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#273 MAY 2014

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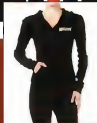
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# SPEAKING OF MONSTERS®

**Eric Draven:**

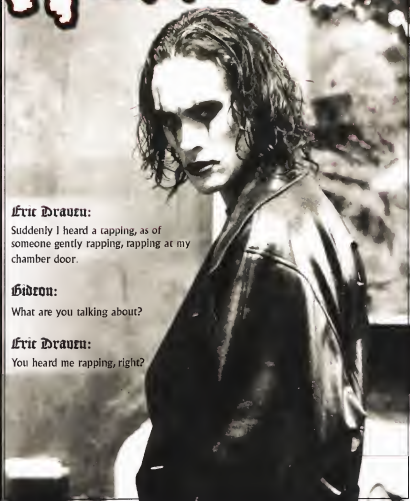
Suddenly I heard a rapping, as of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.

**Madron:**

What are you talking about?

**Eric Draven:**

You heard me rapping, right?





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## OPENING WOUNDS

I've never been to a proper Drive-In. I watched GREMLINS on a roof in downtown Los Angeles from the back of my Toyota, but it didn't really count as the seminal popcorn-laden, foggy-windowed Drive-In experience. That being said, my first exposure to terrifying movies involved almost exclusively the giant-bug-alien-creature-invasion variety often found at Drive-Ins, and these films remain close to my heart.

See, when I was growing up, my family of five would use the Thanksgiving holiday as an excuse to rent five separate horror movies for each day of the week we didn't have school. Five of us, five nights, five movies. It hardly ever worked out exactly according to plan, but the spirit was there, and it drove me and my two sisters to rent the most ridiculous, slobbering, horrible-noise-making monster movies we could find: TREMORS, INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS, CRITTERS, ALLIGATOR 2: THE MUTATION. I even insisted on renting the 80s remake of THE BLOB only to turn it off fifteen minutes in because I was too scared to continue. Questionable parenting aside, the point of the entire venture was to give us a shared experience: piling out the couch, or into the car; piggling out on any shape of sour gummy candy; drawing the blinds, or rolling down the windows; and immersing ourselves in events too ridiculous to be real. This issue takes a look at the Drive-In; how it emerged and what it came to stand for, as well as the over-the-top film fare it tended to encourage.

I've never been much of a watcher of television. But when my friends found out I had never seen an episode of SUPERNATURAL, they couldn't stop laughing. "The way you feel about horror movies and monsters, and you've never even watched it?" I had to concede—and once I did, it was obvious they'd been right. I laughed (really); I cried (not really); I screamed at the many obvious references to genre filmmaking ("Did you see that? Did you see that?"). It's a fun road show, like EASY RIDER with monsters—classic rock and all—and we think that any monster kid willing to buckle in and give it a chance will not be disappointed.

Take all this with a dash of comic book lore, our new ESP guitar, and enough interviews to make Larry King weep (Mike Mignola, Jeremy Robinson, Ernie Hudson, James O'Barr...) and you've got FM 273. Let cool ten minutes before serving.

Holly Interlandi  
Editor

# FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND

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Forrest J Ackerman

Inspiration

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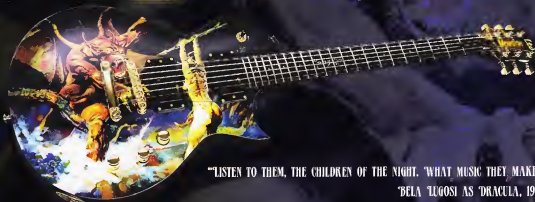
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# THE BEAUTY IS A BEAST

BY ED BLAIR



"LISTEN TO THEM, THE CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT. 'WHAT MUSIC THEY MAKE.'"

BELA LUGOSI AS DRACULA, 1931

The connection between monsters and music has always been strong. From the scores of Universal classics up through modern day bands like The Misfits and Metallica, they have inspired one another for decades. Last year, *Famous Monsters* teamed up with ESP guitars to bring the world its limited edition Vincent Price custom guitar. The idea was the brainchild of ESP Vice President Jeff Moore, a lifelong monster kid who grew up reading FM and drinking in classic Universal and Hammer horror films. Combined with the fact that I had played ESP guitars for over 15 years and had extensive knowledge of their custom abilities, the deal was done before we even left our first lunch together.

This year, we decided to throw a new element into the mix. When Frank Frazetta Jr., son of legendary artist Frank Frazetta (DEATH DEALER, CONAN, TARZAN, CREEPY) approached us about a collaboration, it became a no-brainer as to what would feature on our next guitar. It took all of a few minutes of going through the available artwork to decide on Frazetta's rendition of BEAUTY AND THE BEAST. It was classic Frazetta featuring powerful brushstrokes, a terrifying beast, and a fearless heroine charging into battle.

We took the feedback from the fans the previous year and decided to make some adjustments. First, the guitar will feature two pick-ups instead of just the one from the previous year. This makes it a player's guitar, not just a decorative piece. We chose the more elegantly rounded Eclipse body style that allows the artwork a little more room to breathe. The hardware and accents are in gold, giving the guitar a stunning, bold finish. The guitar is from ESP's LTD line and will launch very soon. Check out [www.captainco.com](http://www.captainco.com) for all the details.

For more on ESP and their amazing creations, check out [www.espguitars.com](http://www.espguitars.com).

## TWEAKING A MONSTER TONE

Speaking of monster kids and music, this year while I, your humble Editor, was attending NAMM (the massive conference in Anaheim where music companies gather to show off their latest gear) for the unveiling of the FM/ESP Frazetta guitar, I was on another mission: to track down the Amptweaker booth and purchase the nastiest, heaviest high gain distortion pedal ever put on this earth: The Tightmetal Pro.

Amptweaker is a company run by James Brown (no, not that James Brown). This James Brown is a legend in the amp and effects industry for collaborating with Eddie Van Halen to create the 5150 sound at Peavey. Brown headed the project that ultimately birthed one of the most classic guitar sounds in rock history. But now he's started his own company that makes high-end effects pedals. He and his wife create each and every pedal by hand from custom components and bomb-proof steel casings. The range of effects covers classic rock and blues sounds to the heaviest death and thrash metal.

Upon finding the booth I saw the object of my affection and struck up a conversation with James. He agreed to let one of them go and I purchased my new baby. It wasn't until I was leaving that I gave him my card so he could email an invoice. Upon seeing the logo he excitedly asked if this was the very same *Famous Monsters* that he grew up reading. I confirmed that it was and from that point forward the conversation was all classic monster movies. I emailed him several days later, telling him how much I enjoyed the pedal and was so impressed with all its features. Here was his reply, true to monster kid form:

*Glad you like the pedal.....it's a cool (and appropriately creepy) personal highlight for me to circle back and make a connection to Famous Monsters.....I feel like the magazine helped steer me creatively around the time I was learning to play guitar. Remember, this was before JAWS, before EXORCIST, before FRIDAY THE 13TH, when the only horror movies we saw were on late night broadcast TV. Now people have so much coming at them with the internet, cable tv, streaming stations, Youtube, etc that it's hard to appreciate how big of a difference it is....no wonder everybody has ADHD. I watched all I could find, and read the magazine cover to cover every time it came out.*

If you're a player looking to make your sound as perfect and as custom as it can be, you owe it to yourself to check out Amptweaker. For more on James and his line of fantastic effects pedals, head on over to [www.amptweaker.com](http://www.amptweaker.com).



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# WINTER IS COMING

## WHAT'S IN STORE FOR MARVEL MOVIE FANS WITH CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE WINTER SOLDIER

BY HOLLY INTERLANDI

**A**lthough the Marvel Cinematic Universe is distinctly different from its Comic Universe these days, the films' source material has always been easy to point to: origin stories, established sidekicks, and iconic villains. The film scribes have been able to play around in the Marvel sandbox without establishing canon beyond the early stories conceived by the likes of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and others in the 1960s. But with the announcement of **CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE WINTER SOLDIER**, Marvel Studios launched headlong into the modern comics era by naming a movie after a very specific and recent story arc: Ed Brubaker and

Steve Epting's "Winter Soldier", beginning in **CAPTAIN AMERICA** Volume 5, Issue #1, in 2005.

Although Ed Brubaker's legendary eight-year run on **CAPTAIN AMERICA** is named for its title character, its impact fell squarely upon the shoulders of his former partner: James Buchanan "Bucky" Barnes, Cap's sidekick during World War II, who—at least when Brubaker picked up the series in 2005—had been dead to the Marvel Universe since 1945, when he was unable to diffuse a bomb on a plane over the English Channel (leading to his and Steve Rogers' presumed deaths). Although Captain America was found buried in the

ice and joined the Avengers in 1964, Bucky stayed dead. For sixty years. Throughout the decades at Marvel, Bucky was Steve Rogers' regret, weighing on his conscience and reminding him of the sacrifices made in wartime.

Then "Winter Soldier" happened.

Brubaker gave us the greatest ret-con of all time when he established that Bucky had *not* been killed; he had been unfrozen by the Russians, brainwashed, and given a bionic arm; then alternatively kept in stasis and used as an assassin during the Cold War. Following his return in the original story, Bucky went so far as to take over as Captain America after Steve Rogers' death.



Afterwards, it was clear that he was going to stick around for good (and eventually get his own series, *WINTER SOLDIER*). The Marvel status quo was officially shattered.

But Brubaker's story didn't only resurrect a long-dead character. The "*Winter Soldier*" story is an artfully told tale that operates a great deal through flashbacks, reconciling the early image of Bucky as a teenage sidekick with our current perceptions of war. Was he a kid? Sure. Deadly? Absolutely. In fact, Brubaker goes so far as to suggest that Bucky did all the "dirty work", like crawling underneath barbed wire to slit the throat of Nazi guards so Cap could bring in the cavalry: "The official story said he was a symbol to counter the rise of the Hitler youth. And there was *some* truth to that. But like all things in war, there was a darker truth underneath." Why go dark? "Marvel heroes were always tragic in some ways," Brubaker told Comics Alliance last

year. "Steve was a tragic guy... lost in time, haunted by his dead friend, weighed down by going from being soldier to superhero, not sure of his place in the modern world."

Of course, the Marvel Cinematic Universe has already made several continuity changes, many of which will have to be addressed for this film version of *WINTER SOLDIER* to work. For example, in the original story, a SHIELD agent named Sharon Carter (Peggy's sister, niece, or whatever works in the timeline) plays the foil to Steve, which is made all the more awkward by their romantic history. In the film, Scarlett Johansson's Black Widow appears to be the major female player; although Carter does appear, it is presumably not in the same capacity as the comic book.

Perhaps most troubling change is the loss of impact that Bucky's return could have on moviegoers, who have only waited three

**LEFT AND BELOW:** Steve Rogers' SHIELD costume in the film is based on the outfit he wore in Ed Brubaker's *STEVE ROGERS: SUPER-SOLDIER*, an interim story during the time that Bucky Barnes was the acting Captain America.







years—between Cap movies, that is—to see him brought back. Although his identity is never mentioned in the trailers, his face has been clearly shown. Will audiences really care when the deadly assassin is revealed to be Steve's best friend from the war? Will they even remember him? How are Anthony and Joe Russo going to reconcile his film death (falling from a train) with

his missing arm (blown off in the English Channel explosion)?

Regardless, reactions to the second trailer and TV spots have been overwhelmingly positive; Anthony Mackie's Falcon looks terrific, and fans of the *AVENGERS* movie will surely show up to see how Cap deals with the modern age. It should also provide plenty of exposure for the original comic,

as the legacy of the Winter Soldier became important enough to wrap an entire cinematic story around. And Brubaker gets to share in the legacy: he has a cameo in the film.

Even if the movie flops (doubtful), the Winter Soldier story will always be one for the ages. It sanded off the innocence of a teen sidekick and gave him a role in actual warfare. It turned previously two-dimensional symbols of propaganda into real human beings. It took a goofy "Hey, Cap!" kid, gave him a bionic arm, made him a badass, and provided Marvel with a brand new, layered, volatile character. It brought emotional espionage and spy tactics to a fictional world often rife with ridiculous *dex ex machina* and convenient superpowers.

There is nothing convenient about Brubaker's brutal tale, even when the cosmic cube is involved. Steve Rogers begins the story stressed out and angry and ends it regretful and shocked. Steve Epting's artwork contains no soft lines or tentative facial expressions—his use of shadows and grimaces carry the plot perfectly (and continue to in Brubaker and Epting's ongoing spy series for Image Comics, *VELVET*). "You can feel the reality in Steve's stuff," said Brubaker. "It's got a weight to the action scenes, and his layouts are simply classic in his composition. Plus, he's a master of scope. You ask for a setting, and you get it. You feel how big a city is, or how fast a train is moving." The scope of the art makes the plot sequences all the more intense. Even the reunion moment is cut short—we're barely allowed to catch our breath before it ends. Brutal.

Everything featured in footage thus far suggests that **CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE WINTER SOLDIER** will mirror that brutality; at least so far as a mainstream thriller will allow. And if what Brubaker says is true—that's the "best movie Marvel has ever made"—it will surely cement **WINTER SOLDIER**'s status as a titan in modern storytelling. ●



# SON OF FRANKENSTEIN

## 75TH ANNIVERSARY

BY SCOTT ESSMAN

**R**leased on January 13, 1939, SON OF FRANKENSTEIN was a remarkable Universal Pictures horror sequel that almost never existed. The film's striking attention to detail in its design and conception remains a landmark in horror films, and given the significant talent involved, the movie has long been considered a classic alongside its 1930s studio brethren.

The film's journey started with the departure of the Laemmle family, when Universal went into receivership in 1937. Surely, the Laemmles, chiefly studio head Carl and head of production Carl Jr., were responsible for the first run of horror classics, from 1925's THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA to 1931's DRACULA and FRANKENSTEIN to 1932's THE MUMMY, 1933's THE INVISIBLE MAN, and many others in between, plus the superb sequels THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN (1935) and DRACULA'S DAUGHTER (1936). When they left the studio, not only did the horror zeitgeist leave with them, the new regime in charge was more interested in light romantic comedies than churning out new horror films. Moreover, several key personnel left at the same time, most notably director James

Whale (FRANKENSTEIN, THE OLD DARK HOUSE, THE INVISIBLE MAN, and BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN) and key art director Charles D. Hall (virtually all of the 1930s Laemmle classics). Thus, it would not have been at all surprising if horror had remained dead at Universal in the late 1930s and possibly into the 1940s. However, a key event in 1938 ushered in not only SON OF FRANKENSTEIN, but also a horde of original horror films and sequels to the Laemmle films in the early 1940s until the end of World War II.

It all started with a desperate small businessman. On Thursday, August 5, 1938, at the corner of Wilshire Boulevard and La Cienega Boulevard in the heart of Los Angeles, Emil Umann, owner of the Regina-Wilshire Theatre, facing bankruptcy, created an unprecedented stunt: he initiated what he originally intended as a four-day run triple-feature of DRACULA, FRANKENSTEIN, and SON OF KONG. The films mesmerized the Los Angeles moviegoing public, with lines forming around the block of the theater to see the films. Two things emerged from this surprise phenomenon. First, Universal decided to put DRACULA and





Pictured here, Universal Pictures' SON OF FRANKENSTEIN began life as a quickly produced sequel to capitalize on the overwhelming success of a reissue of the original 1931 classic, DRACULA and FRANKENSTEIN, in August of 1938. However, the project soon accumulated the talents of director Rowland V. Lee who sought to create a film separate and unique from its predecessors; the aforementioned FRANKENSTEIN and 1935's THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN, and eventually attracted the indelible performers Boris Karloff (as the Monster) and Bela Lugosi (as Ygor) in addition to Basil Rathbone and Liane Havill who, together, formed the project's unprecedented ensemble cast.



FRANKENSTEIN together as a double-bill, re-released in theaters across the country at that time (of note, the Hays Production Code was in place then, meaning that many "objectionable" elements of both films were edited out and would not be replaced in screenings or televised and video versions of the films for over 30 years). Next, on August 29, 1938, Universal announced a new FRANKENSTEIN film which would star the man who made the first two films international sensations: Boris Karloff.

With Whale having departed, young writer Wyllis Cooper was tasked with writing the screenplay for the urgent project. Little is known about Cooper other than that he was still in his 30s when he wrote the screenplay—one of a handful of credits he had at the time. Of note, in early drafts of Cooper's script, which might have had a working title of AFTER FRANKENSTEIN, a crucial character was missing, one whom Béla Lugosi eventually played in one of horror cinema's greatest comeback stories. At the same time, new studio production head Cluff Work also brought a new journeyman director into the fray. His name was Rowland V. Lee, and he had been a director of numerous silent films in the 1920s after working as an actor in the 1910s. Lee likely garnered studio favor after helming SERVICE DE LUXE for Universal that same year—Vincent Price's first film. While FRANKENSTEIN series mainstays Jack Pierce (makeup design), Vera West (costume design), and John P. Fulton (visual effects) returned, new to the fold was art director Jack Otterson, who had come aboard as the studio's chief art director after being promoted from set decorator. Significantly, after Charles D. Hall had left the key art director slot open following his last Universal film (James Whale's THE ROAD BACK), Otterson's approach to SON OF FRANKENSTEIN would become almost wholly unique and separate from all that Hall had contributed to both Frankenstein movies before him.

By SON OF FRANKENSTEIN's fall 1938 production, Cooper's script did include the character of Ygor, whom Lee lovingly cast with Béla Lugosi. After DRACULA in 1931, Lugosi was an international star, and through his many 1930s pairings with Boris Karloff, his legacy was forever cemented. However, by the late 1930s, the great roles which continued relentlessly for Karloff throughout his whole career were not as dynamic for Lugosi. Arguably, by the time of SON OF FRANKENSTEIN's production, his last great role had been in Universal's THE INVISIBLE RAY in 1936—and having not been in a FRANKENSTEIN film, there was certain risk in adding Lugosi to the FRANKENSTEIN universe.

Lugosi was a superb addition to the SON OF FRANKENSTEIN cast and delivers a performance equal in quality if not stature to DRACULA. As the self-appointed caretaker of the Frankenstein Monster (Karloff), Ygor is at once a fully original and pioneering Universal horror character with many dynamic touches to the role, both as written and in Lugosi's memorable performance. Though he had thwarted Jack Pierce's efforts to devise and apply a makeup for him on DRACULA, by 1938, Lugosi had loosened his grip on his cinematic appearance and allowed Pierce to conjure a gnarled-toothed wretch with scars, beard, hairstyle, and the notably broken neck, since Ygor was the convicted man who could not be hanged. Lugosi's chosen vocal intonations for the horn-palking Ygor were an ideal match for his appearance as he does the talking for both himself and the Monster throughout the film.

In point, for SON OF FRANKENSTEIN, the Monster inexplicably does not speak. He had not spoken in the first film, but by BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN, the monster had learned to speak, reason, and interact with people. By SON OF FRANKENSTEIN, for no given reason, Karloff returned to a fully non-verbal performance. While not as legendary as his appearance



As the two men who carried the Universal Monster movies on their shoulders, Karloff and Lugosi shared a special kinship, apparent from quiet moments shared like these, where Karloff plays Jack Pierce and touches up Lugosi's makeup.

in the 1931 film, Karloff, wearing a modified version of Pierce's renowned makeup and a shaggy sleeveless coat added for effect, does a solid, understated turn as the character—his last such leading performance in the role.

In equally apt performances were actors new to the franchise, including Basil Rathbone as the titular prodigal son, playing Baron Wolf von Frankenstein; Lionel Atwill as the suspicious Inspector Krough; Josephine Hutchinson as adoring wife Elsa von Frankenstein; and Donnie Dunagan as Peter, the grandson of Frankenstein. As of this writing, Dunagan is alive and well at age 79 and has fond memories of making the film.

Though reportedly SON OF FRANKENSTEIN's credited art director Jack Otterson was not hands-on involved in making the film (a common studio practice at the time was to only credit studio department heads on every film regardless of each craftsman's specific participation in the project), his department constructed the individual sets on the movie, which represent among the most expressive ever built for a Universal film.

Noticeably gone is Hall's tower laboratory set from the first two FRANKENSTEIN films. In its place, Otterson's team constructed a more self-contained laboratory on a platform raised over a sulfur pit, set off with an enormous back wall. Naturally, much of the action involving the Monster takes place in the lab, including a climactic scene where Baron has to rescue his son from the underfoot clutches of the Monster who has been manipulated by Ygor for dastardly purposes. However, the most striking scene in the lab is one played in near silence, when the Monster climbs up from the depths of the sulfur pit to first encounter the Baron. Done in pseudo-pantomime between Karloff and Rathbone, the Monster thinks he has come back to life to discover his original maker, Henry, only to realize he is merely encountering Henry's son. At the end of the scene, the Monster, seeing himself in the mirror, expresses his disgust at his own appearance and makes pleas to Baron for a resolution.

In addition to the lab set, the filmmakers gave SON OF FRANKENSTEIN magnetic art direction throughout the film. For one, the Frankenstein home features several beautifully rendered rooms. The giant main hall and staircase are a gothic delight with oversized bunnisters, tall narrow doorways, and high-backed chairs, all framed by Lee with under-lit, exaggerated shadows. The family eating area is just as remarkable, with two opposing, elongated, elevated, curved walkways, framing each side of the room. These set-pieces give the room an undeniable presence in the film and provide Lee with ample added back wall shadowing. A drawing room is accentuated with tall curved arches and amplified multi-pane windows. George Robinson's cinematography on these sets routinely seeks to maximize these spaces with sharp angles, blanketing shadows, and heightened drama. Other exterior sets, such as the castle gate and graveyard, enhance the overall spirit of the production and contribute to the film's themes.

In fact, aside from Karloff's basic reappearance as the Monster with SON OF FRANKENSTEIN, the filmmakers seem decided in their attempt to make this a film totally apart from its predecessors, as very little if anything remains from the earlier films. Perhaps even the Monster's lack of speech and added shaggy coat consciously pushed the film further in that direction. With its stellar cast, crisp art direction, eerie cinematography, and overall focused direction, it must be said that SON OF FRANKENSTEIN, now 75 years old, stands on its own as a Universal classic monsters masterpiece. ●

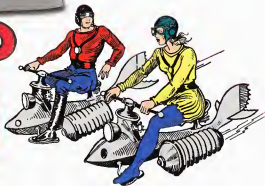


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# DINNER, MOVIE, AND A MONSTER: THE LEGACY OF DRIVE-INS



# Drive-ins and Their Monstrous Legacy



by Peter Martin

We all love monsters: bug-eyed beasts, creatures from the deep, invaders from space... we love them all equally and are happy to pile into our cars, drive to the local multiplex, meet up with friends, buy some popcorn, and sit back in stadium-seating style to watch the latest blockbuster featuring a beloved monster—or a superhero or two.

But what if you didn't have to get out of your car to enjoy the latest and greatest that Hollywood has to offer? Why, then, my friends, you'd have to be lucky enough to live within reach of a Drive-In movie theatre, an increasingly rare type of venue that is, nonetheless, staging a comeback of sorts, both for nostalgic types and for those who want to experience the glories of watching movies under the stars. Modern Drive-Ins inevitably remind us of the past and of the classic Sci-Fi and horror movies

that drew audiences in the 1950s and 60s.

The technology has changed, but the spirit of these genre pictures remains the same. Consider, for example, *THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD*. Inspired by the 1938 novella "Who Goes There?" by Don A. Stuart—the pseudonym of famed magazine editor John W. Campbell, Jr.—*THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD* is an alien invasion movie that pits a single extraterrestrial "soldier" against a group of scientists in an encampment at the North Pole. It's a significant milestone in Sci-Fi action movies, exciting but not terrifying, and with its hints of family-friendly romance, perfect for Drive-In audiences in the early 1950s when parents packed their kids into their new, roomy sedans.

Drive-Ins date back to 1933, when businessman Richard M. Hollingshead devised and built the very first Drive-In

movie theater in Camden, New Jersey. But they didn't really pick up steam until after World War II, when returning veterans could purchase their very own automobile—a new status symbol—for their growing families. The suburbs were calling, land was cheap, and the idea of getting out of the house for an evening of inexpensive entertainment became very appealing.

By the mid-1950s, teenagers began to assert their unruly movie taste—more on that in a moment—and by the early 1980s, Drive-In theaters were struggling to survive. Changing tastes in movie fare, however, meant that John Carpenter's new version of *THE THING* could play just as well at Drive-Ins as the original. Carpenter and his team took full advantage of practical effects to produce a terrifying, shape-shifting creature leaving a trail



of eye-popping blood and violence in its wake. As dark as it was, Carpenter's version shared with the original a desire to captivate audiences, to make them sit up in their chairs—or their car seats—and pay attention.

That wasn't always easy at the Drive-Ins of the 1950s and 60s. The looming specter of television had a profound effect on movie-going patterns, especially as the price of TV sets dropped and family heads realized there was nothing cheaper and easier to enjoy than free programs in the comfort of your own living room. Concurrently, the novelty of Drive-In theaters faded, even as owners added playgrounds, pony rides, monkey villages, and miniature golf courses.

Adding to the challenges facing Drive-In theaters, Hollywood studios viewed the "ozoners"—as they came to be called—with suspicion. According to the book *THE AMERICAN DRIVE-IN MOVIE THEATRE* by Don and Susan Sanders, "Studios disliked promotions such as 'children under 12 admitted free' or 'buck night,' in which every car, regardless of

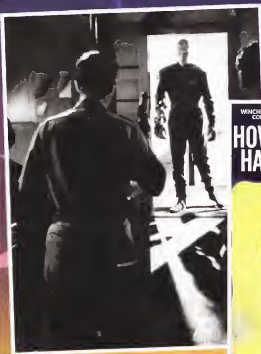
how many passengers it had, got in for only \$1." An MGM executive expressed his displeasure: "We do not believe that these offenders are entitled to the same availability of our product." So, while the studios began experimenting with larger screen formats—Cinerama, 3D, CinemaScope, VistaVision, and others—and chose projects that would fit the format such as ambitious epics like *THE ROBE* and *20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA*, Drive-In theaters had to rely on independent distributors for new titles.

Ah, but wonder of wonders, the studios' disdain of Drive-Ins and their near total indifference to an emerging segment of moviegoers led to great opportunities—and some of our most fondly remembered pictures—from open-minded outfits like American International Pictures. In his autobiography *HOW I MADE A HUNDRED MOVIES IN HOLLYWOOD AND NEVER LOST A DIME* (written with Jim Jerome), filmmaker Roger Corman noted, "The spreading popularity of the Drive-Ins helped open a new film market for rebellious youth. For years the studios either didn't notice or didn't care that TV had altered movie-going habits. But [American International Pictures executive James Nicholson]

saw the movie audience shifting to young people, primarily from thirteen to about thirty years old, with a heavy emphasis on teens and early twenties." Corman, who had turned 30 the year before, started making movies specifically for the Drive-In youth market in 1957, starting with four briskly-paced stories filmed in black and white: *ROCK ALL NIGHT*, *SORORITY GIRL*, *CARNIVAL ROCK*, and *TEENAGE DOLL*.

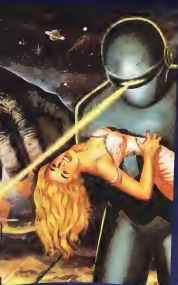
While it's true that acclaimed movies like *THE WILD ONE* (1953), *BLACKBOARD JUNGLE* (1955), and *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE* (1955) drew praise and attracted audiences, their Hollywood studio pedigree meant that their true intended audience was parents, not teenagers; note how each of those movies, for example, makes sure to placate adults. (For all its angst, *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE* ends with the reconciliation of James Dean with his dad, who promises to be a better father.) The independent teen movies, exemplified by Corman's 1957 output, shook off such stuffy nonsense. They were fun and lighthearted, whether they carried deeper meanings (as in Corman's films) or not (most others). So they connected with the audiences, who still craved the creature features.

And what creature features they were! Hundreds of Sci-Fi movies were made in the 1950s and 60s, ranging from the high-minded and issue-oriented (*THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL*, *WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE*) to low, low-budget





# THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL



## WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

PLANETS DESTROY EARTH!



exploitation fare like **ROBOT MONSTER** (made for \$16,000, it reportedly returned more than one million dollars at the box office). But the monsters ruled the day, especially the giant-sized ones. Scientists insist that such creatures as the giant ants in **THEM!** could not possibly exist, but they're missing the point. We're introduced to them through the traumatized eyes of a little girl lost in the desert; we can hear the strange, unsettling sound they make, and so we share her absolute horror. As an adult, I can look at the creature effects with a touch of amusement—admittedly primitive by today's standards—yet I remember the dread that grew in my belly when I first saw them on screen.

A product of the studio system, **THEM!** has strong production values and looks more polished than most Sci-Fi movies of the era. Yet even when budgets were tiny and the effects looked cheesy—c'mon, nobody in the 50s was so naive as to actually believe **THE BLOB** looked real—the movies exhibited an innate enthusiasm for their subject matter. The executives may have been looking to maximize their profit potential, but the filmmakers appreciated their relative freedom, without the restrictions of the hidebound studio system. Roger Corman, for example, produced his first film, **THE MONSTER**,

FROM THE OCEAN FLOOR, for a grand total of \$12,000. His star was a "man-eating mutant created after atomic testing." In reality, it was "a puppet shot from behind a cloudy fish tank." Filming was completed in six days. The picture turned a tidy profit.

When the movies were good, of course, it didn't matter how cheap the effects looked. **THE BLOB** may have been nothing more than a mix of red dye and silicone that fit into a five-gallon pail, but the idea of huge, oozing, gelatinous creature bursting out of a theater balcony and consuming the audience was truly creepy. The images became the thought behind them,

is so unsettling, in a somewhat similar example, the Blu-ray edition of 1953's **THE WAR OF THE WORLDS** revealed the never-before-so-obvious wires that held up the Martian ships. Disconcerting? Yes. But does it destroy the movie? No, because the *idea* of a seemingly invincible force of alien creatures, bent on wiping out mankind, is so powerful that it transcends the effects.

And that is the lasting legacy of the movies released during the height of the Drive-In era (roughly the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s): As in the best-written science fiction novels and short stories, it's the ideas

that touched nerves: the *idea* that people could be replaced by emotionless aliens without anyone noticing (INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS), the *idea* that the atomic age might spawn giant, destructive creatures (THEM!), but also *Gofira*, aka GODZILLA, the *idea* that a man might diminish in size to the point that a normal-sized cat and spider look like giants to him (THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN), the *idea* that classic monsters might be resurrected and be more scary than ever (THE CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN, HORROR OF DRACULA). The Hammer horror pictures, presented in bloody color, were a sensation on the Drive-In circuit, as teenagers drew closer together and

steamed up car windows across the nation. Adding horror to the equation kept Drive-Ins busy into the early 60s, as filmmakers mined the classics for inspiration, perhaps most notably with Roger Corman's series of pictures taken from the mind of Edgar Allan Poe, beginning with 1959's HOUSE OF USHER.

The Drive-In legacy can also be seen in filmmakers who grew up in that era, some of whom feature Drive-In theaters in their movies, including Peter Bogdanovich's TARGETS (1968), Steven Spielberg's THE SUGARLAND EXPRESS (1974), Joe Dante's EXPLORERS (1985), and Tim Burton's PEE-WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE (1985). Even as Drive-Ins

become more scarce, they remain a rich source of inspiration—who could forget the Oklahoma Drive-In theater ripped apart by a tornado in 1996's TWISTER? (The touch of humor is that the horror movie playing on the screen before it blows away is Stanley Kubrick's THE SHINING.)

Nowadays, modern Drive-In theaters face a new challenge: digital projection. With the studios junking 35mm film distribution, theater owners must adapt and purchase new equipment to show current releases in digital formats. That's a costly proposition, requiring an investment of more than \$75,000 for most owners operating on already thin margins. Drive-In theaters cannot continue without active support from moviegoers.

Whatever happens to the facilities themselves, though, the legacy of the Drive-Ins will survive. After all, what are small TVs installed in the seat backs of vans and SUVs if not miniature Drive-In theaters? And what are Superman and Batman and the Avengers but comic book incarnations of THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD and IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE? The ideas live on. ♦

# TERROR STRIKES!.... FROM BENEATH THE SEA



# MONSTER

FROM THE OCEAN FLOOR

"MONSTER FROM THE OCEAN FLOOR" • ANNE KIMMEL • STUART WARD • TONY SPAR  
Produced by MICHAEL TAYLOR • Screenplay by MICHAEL TAYLOR • Directed by MICHAEL TAYLOR  
A RAMPART PRODUCTION • A COLUMBIA PICTURES PRESENTATION



SEE... HERE BATTLE WITH MAN-EATING SHARK!

SEE... MONSTER CREATURE OF ATOMIC AGE!



Take a furry suit, slap on some antennae, add screams, and voila: the Rebel Monster (ABOVE), a million dollar moneymaker.



## MUSHROOM CLOUDS, MUTANTS, AND MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER

BY D. M. CUNNINGHAM

It was July 16, 1945. Two days ahead of schedule, Trinity—the codename for the atomic bomb test—unleashed 20 kilotons of terror. Blinding light and an ominous, twisting cloud reaching 70,000 feet high changed the world forever. Suddenly, the Atomic Age was settling upon us in flecks of grey ash. It wasn't long after the "The Gadget" was detonated in a bleak 3200 acres of desert that nightmarish visions of destroyed cities, mushroom clouds, and mutants became a part of the collective consciousness.

While some concerned citizens of America were busy building fallout shelters, Hollywood was building something else: fear. Radiation cinema was exploding across the country. Chilling tag lines like *"A horror horde of crawl-and-crash giants clawing out of the Earth from mile-deep catacombs!"* and *"Out of primordial depths to destroy the world!"* were splashed across movie posters to accompany B-grade horror and science fiction films hoping to cash in on the rampant paranoia that was spreading like a plague.

But it wasn't just movie monsters that were mutating. The firmly planted roots of movie houses were creeping across the landscape into open fields, and silver screens were sprouting up like weeds. The way we saw movies was no longer

contained inside four walls. Launched in Pennsauken, New Jersey in 1933 by a man named R.M. Hollingshead, the Drive-In started as a screen nailed to a tree. Over the next twenty years it became a multi-million dollar industry that hit its peak in the late 50s and early 60s.

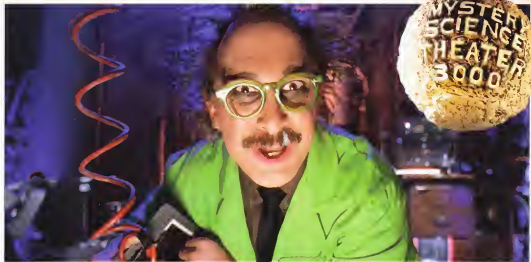
And the Drive-In was the perfect place to view the cinematic horrors Hollywood was pumping out faster than gasoline. For a few dollars your entire family could squeeze into a car and share buckets of greasy popcorn and rubbery hot dogs while "riffing" on the movie. It was both private and communal. But for every Sci-Fi gem like *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL*, there were half a dozen horrible knock-offs looming in its shadow. The knock-offs quickly died, while the great ones lived long cinematic lives and continue to capture audiences today.

Unbeknownst to those dried up celluloid schlock-fests, they were about to be given a second life: a life that would allow some of them to step out of the shadows and into a radiant spotlight. The fears, paranoia, and horrendously bad filmmaking of atomic age cinema that played on hundreds of open-air screens across the country became golden fodder for a group of comedians on their way to unknowing cult status.

Some fifty-five years after the creation

of the Drive-In and some 1179 miles away in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the local television station KTMA unleashed its own brand of terror. *MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000* premiered on November 24, 1988, to hordes of unsuspecting viewers. Created by comedian Joel Hodgson, MST3K featured a man and his robot sidekicks, imprisoned on a space station by an evil scientist and forced to watch a selection of bad movies as part of a psychological experiment. To keep their wits about them, they entertained themselves by providing a running commentary on each film, poking fun of its obvious flaws and wisecracking, or riffing, their way through each reel in the style of a movie theater peanut gallery.

From the beginning, Hodgson was joined by Trace Beaulieu and very young Josh Weinstein. Beaulieu played Dr. Forrester and handled the voice duties of Crow T. Robot for seven seasons, and Weinstein voiced Tom Servo, sadly for only one season. Through the years, line-up changes were made and big shoes were filled by equally talented comedians: Kevin Murphy (1990-99), Frank Conniff (1990-95), Michael J. Nelson (1993-99), Mary Jo Pehl (1994-99), Bill Corbett (1997-99), and Patrick Brantseg (1997-99). *Famous Monsters* recently caught up with a few members of the comedy



troupe to "riff" about Drive-Ins during their busy schedules.

**Famous Monsters.** A lot of the movies you riff on played at Drive-Ins or have that wonderful dusty quality to them. Can we talk about some of the films you remember seeing at a Drive-In?

**Trace Beaulieu.** I don't think I ever saw any of the films we did on MST at a Drive-In. HANGER 18, from the KTMA days of MST, comes close, but I think I spent full price on that ticket. A lot of these classics were before my time. Or they played in one of those very rural Drive-Ins I didn't live near. You know, the places that always seemed to be screening Sunn Classic stuff. I passed on seeing a lot of Grizzly Adams films.

**Josh Weinstein.** As a kid, my parents took my brother and me to see a double feature of JAWS and THE DEEP. It was scary... until I fell asleep.

**Mary Jo Pehl.** I went to a Drive-In once with a bunch of friends when we were in high school. I was pretty shy and nerdy in high school—I thought if I listened to Led Zeppelin I would instantly turn into a drug addict—so the fact that I had a

group to hang with was thrilling to me. We saw PIRANHA. I had a group of like minds with me, and we laughed our heads off about it.

**TB.** I do remember seeing, and this was when I was very young, a lot of Doris Day movies and gladiator films. I don't think they were on the same bill. Maybe the second feature was a gladiator film. Anyway, these were all seen from a blanket on the top of the family car. Odd way to look at films, but a great way to get the family out of the house, and it was cheap, cheap, cheap entertainment. I saw the first Indiana Jones film in second run that way. Or I think I saw it. It was summer and the sun didn't go down until very late in the evening. The friend I was with had an anxiety attack just as the film started and we might have left.

**FM.** Did anyone sneak into the Drive-In? Maybe inside a car trunk?

**TB.** We never did the "load the trunk with kids trick" to pay less money. Also, we never even thought about taking girls with us. As far as we were concerned (nerds, all of us), girls hadn't been invented

yet. I remember seeing a bunch of really bad stuff like NIGHT CALL NURSES and SWINGING CHEERLEADERS. We thought these films were going to be super dirty.

**FM.** Those sound horrible, and I'm adding them to my watch list. Can we talk about the appeal of Drive-Ins?

**TB.** Drive-In movies were cheap. I think that was the big appeal. You could take the entire family, babies included, and not bother anyone. Also, they appealed to lazy people. You didn't even have to get out of your car. Except of course to go get bad pizza and other nasty Drive-In food.

**MJP.** Convenience for families; making out in a car for couples; it is both a public and private experience. You're in a public place, a gathering of people to watch a movie, but you also have the privacy of a car to do what you will. I wonder how many babies were conceived at Drive-Ins, don't you?

**FM.** I have no doubt there were a lot of third acts in movies that were never seen. It seems like a great place for teenagers to





be initiated into adulthood.

**JW.** I think the slight level of privacy Drive-Ins give you is the appeal. A nice dark place to park your car and do as you wish... movie related or not.

**FM.** I saw *STAR WARS* and *NATIONAL LAMPOON'S VACATION* at the Drive-In. Beverly D'Angelo is burned into my brain forever. Shower scene. That's all I can say. What about a favorite Drive-In movie?

**MJP.** The only one I can remember seeing—*PIRANHA*!

**TB.** One film that I remember really wanting to see was *THE HUNGER*. It was very intense, as I recall. Made more so by the fact that I was in the back seat, and most of the film was obscured by the rearview mirror. Horror is always much more effective if the terror is implied. Most of that film was lost on me.

**JW.** The last one I ever saw—*GROUNDHOG DAY*.

**FM.** What's the appeal of bad movies?

**TB.** There is an innocent charm in these things. Someone was very serious and passionate about making a film, but they missed some important element along the way—like acting. Or having a believable creature. Sometimes it is just Schadenfreude. That can't-stop-watching-a-train-wreck quality.

**JW.** It's a harmless way to feel superior to people.

**FM.** If you could name the worst movie of the lot, what would it be?

**TB.** Worst and my least favorite is *DOOMSDAY MACHINE*. A film so incompetently made, the filmmakers actually stopped making it—then, two years later, tacked on a quick and silly ending. Dreadful.

**JW.** *LEGACY OF BLOOD* is probably the most painful.

**MJP.** My blood curdles with loathing at the very mention of *SANTA CLAUS CONQUERS THE MARTIAN*.

The irony is that *MST3K* may have made a better living off the films they

mocked than the filmmakers themselves. The dreams and hopes of bright-eyed writers, producers, and directors with a poorly crafted film didn't stop in the 50s and 60s; as a matter of fact, they became more rampant with ever-growing technology.

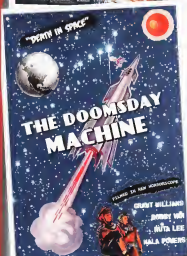
But as the saying goes, all good things must come to an end. What a true and terrifying statement. When *MST3K* made its final airing on the Sci-Fi Channel in 1999, there was a vacuous space in hearts and on our television screens. At the height of the popularity of the Drive-In, theaters numbered in the thousands of screens; today, according to the United Drive-In Theatre Owners Association, there are currently only 366 Drive-Ins in the United States, with a total of 606 screens.

But good things never truly end. Shows like *MST3K* and the institution of Drive-Ins continue to live on, whether in our hearts and minds or off on some dusty back road in Pennsylvania. As fans, we carry the torch forward and share with others and create new fans and moviegoers. So the cycle continues.

In 2007, Trace Beaulieu, Josh Weinstein, and Mary Jo Pehl reunited with Joel Hodgson and Frank Conniff to create *CINEMATIC TITANIC*—essentially the live-action version of *MST3K*, and as a fan, it was something quite amazing to see. As of this writing, *CT*'s five year run came to an end in December 2012, when they performed their last live show.

The atomic ash has settled, the Drive-In dust clouds are fewer, and the movie riffing may have slowed down a bit, but there is always something lurking in the shadows. From the depths, bad movies will continue to rise and give us something to riff about. They will frustrate us, inspire us, and entertain us. As Tom Servo said during the *STAR FORCE: FUGITIVE ALIEN II* episode from the *KTMA* Season 0 airing: "They must've spent tens of dollars on this."

We can only hope so. ☹



CREATED BY JOEL HODGSON, DIRECTED BY REMY-PORC  
WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY TRACE BEAULIEU, FRANK CONNIFF,  
JOEL HODGSON, MARY JO PEHL, ALAN MCKINTEM  
...and more! ... New Video Series! ...  
... The Show ...





The oldest operating Drive-In in America is located in my hometown of Allentown, Pennsylvania. Built in 1934, Shankweiler's Drive-In continues to run movies for families looking for an evening out and hoping to watch a film in the open air. As a kid, I remember seeing such flicks as *BAMBI*, *STAR TREK II*, and *THE CANNONBALL RUN*, and as a teenager, friends and I sat in the back of my parents' station wagon to see movies like *THE LOST BOYS* and *HELLRAISER*. Had I been born in the fifties, however, I am sure I would have seen the horror and Sci-Fi films that I love so much at the theater rather than on Saturday afternoon television—and most of those would have been screened at Shankweiler's Drive-In, especially the low budget, lovable, and sometimes laughable big bug and alien invader movies.

If there is one film of the fifties that best captures that feel and appeal of the Drive-In, it is 1958's *THE BLOB*. This mixture of camp and chills that oozed across movie screens was typical of

the fare one could find at Drive-Ins of the era, when low budget Sci-Fi and horror reigned supreme. In fact, in the film version of the musical *GREASE* (which is set in 1958), it is a trailer for *THE BLOB* that viewers can see playing on screen in the sequence set at the Drive-In.

*THE BLOB* tells the story of a meteor that lands in the outskirts of a small Pennsylvania community. A hermit (Olin Howland) pokes around the meteor shell, and a slime-like substance emerges and engulfs his hand. Two teenagers out necking—Steve and Jane (played by Steve McQueen and Aneta Corsaut)—try to help the old man and take him to the local doctor (Stephen Chase). But the Blob soon devours the old man, and then the doctor and his nurse (Lee Payton).

With each human meal, the Blob gets bigger (and redder), and nothing is able to stop it. The local police refuse to believe Steve's claims of an alien jelly consuming the population, thinking he is pulling a prank. In the film's most famous scene, the Blob attacks

a movie theater, emerging from the projection booth and sending the locals screaming into the night (if you look closely, you will see that many of the "scared" patrons are actually laughing and smiling as they run out of the theater). Steve, Jane, and her little brother end up trapped in a diner, which the Blob covers in an attempt to eat them. After finally getting help from Lt. Dave (Earl Rowe) of the local police, Steve and the townspeople try to destroy the creature with electricity. They soon discover that the Blob doesn't like the cold, so they freeze the menace and the Air Force drops the



**TOP:** Olin Howland gets a handful of slime.

**LEFT:** Steve McQueen and Aneta Corsaut discuss the philosophical repercussions of being eaten by alien goo.

**BELOW:** A poster for Phoenixville's Blobfest, held annually in honor of the town's role in the film.



iced jelly into the Arctic. As the movie ends, the words "The End" turn into a question mark.

Teens flocked into Drive-Ins (and regular theaters) to see **THE BLOB**, and the independently produced low-budget flick ended up making millions. It's easy to see why it was so popular. The premise itself was unique—at first it seems silly, but when you think about it, an unstoppable alien slime that can't be reasoned with and only wants to eat you quickly goes from humorous to chilling. But kids also liked seeing teens like themselves driving around in hot rods and showing up the adults who refuse to take them seriously. And the comical theme song written by Burt Bacharach—yes, *the* Burt Bacharach—remains memorable to all who have seen the film.

**THE BLOB** was produced by Jack H. Harris, directed by Irvin Yeaworth Jr., and written by Kay Linaker (credited as Kate Phillips) and Theodore Simonson. It has received much attention over the years because it starred Steve McQueen (billed as "Steven McQueen") in one of his first leading roles. He was 27 at the time—a bit too old to be playing a teenager, but he still does a good job. (In the seventies, the film was re-

11th ANNUAL  
**BLOBFEST**  
**2010**

it CRAWLS... it CREEPS... it eats you **ALIVE!**

THE COLONIAL THEATRE  
PHOENIXVILLE · PA  
**JULY 9-11**

RUNNING OUT  
**FRIDAY**  
THE BLOB  
**SATURDAY**



released to cash in on McQueen's success in *THE TOWERING INFERNO* and misrepresented as an Irwin Allen-type disaster picture!) Reportedly, the producers had signed McQueen for a three film contract, but found him to be so difficult to work with that they released him from the deal. Had they kept the future superstar under contract, he most likely would have starred in their next two Sci-Fi features: *THE 4-D MAN* and *DINOSAURUS*. McQueen was offered either \$2500 or 10% of the profits for his work

in *THE BLOB*, and he chose the \$2500, thinking the film would bomb (and because he needed to pay the rent). The pic ended up grossing over \$4 million. It was originally budgeted at \$120,000, but producers later revealed they made the film for only \$110,000.

Making her movie debut, female lead Aneta Corsaut became a regular on *THE ANDY GRIFFITH SHOW*, playing Andy Taylor's girlfriend and later wife Helen Crump. The film also marked the final screen appearance of Olin Howland (billed as "Howlin" in the movie), who plays the Blob's first victim. He was never a major star, but his credits go all way back to 1918.

Different music was originally planned for the opening credits of the film before producers decided on the comedic but catchy theme that was used instead. "Beware of the Blob" was composed by Burt Bacharach and Mack David, brother of Burt's longtime collaborator. Bacharach was not an unknown at the time like many think, though this was one of his earliest hits—the theme was released as a single, and it made the top 40. The song is credited to a group called "the Five Blobs", but was actually performed by singer Bernie Klee multiple times with tracks laid over each other to make it sound like a group. Apparently, Klee also provided the popping sound effects that are a memorable part of the song.

The special effects in *THE BLOB* seem rather primitive at times, such as when the Blob consumes the diner. But many of the scenes featuring the gelatinous mass are still memorable, including the moment when the Blob suddenly oozes up the stick to engulf the old hermit's hand, and the Blob flowing from the theater's projection booth windows to attack the audience. The Blob's changing color adds a nice, gruesome touch to the picture—it starts as a clear jelly, but gets redder and redder with each person it eats. Red vegetable dye gave the Blob its distinct blood-like coloring, while the substance itself was made out of silicon (a modified weather balloon was used in the early shots). The red gelatin Blob was later bought by collector Wes Shank in 1965, and is still put on display from time to time.

One of the best places to see the Blob is BLOBFEST, an annual summer celebration in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania focusing on the fun and fright of the original film. Many scenes from the movie were shot in Phoenixville (with its residents used as extras), including the Blob's cinema attack, which was filmed at the town's Colonial Theater. A re-enactment of the sequence is one of the many activities during this three-day event devoted to fifties Sci-Fi. Horror hosts, guest speakers, and actors from the film appear live for lectures and Q&A sessions, and there are also street fairs and parades to attend. Props from the movie are on display (Shank often appears live with the Blob in tow), and tours show the locations where the film was shot. The movie itself is screened at the Colonial, along with other Sci-Fi classics such as *TARANTULA*, *THE DEADLY MANTIS*, and *THEM*. Guests can also visit nearby Downingtown (the film's actual setting), where



**It's the calm before the storm as hapless moviegoers prepare to become victims in one of *THE BLOB*'s most famous scenes. The capacity crowd flees for their lives and The Blob attempts to escape the theater, proving definitively that there is not always room for Jell-O.**



The "RUN OUT", one of THE BLOB's most famous scenes. Each year at Blobfest in Phoenixville, PA, a sellout crowd of ticket holders re-enacts this famous scene by running from the Colonial Theatre, screaming for their lives, much to the delight of onlookers. If you can score a ticket, it's well worth it!

the Chef's Diner has been restored and visitors can take pictures of the basement where Steve McQueen once faced off against the murderous muck.

THE BLOB was not reviewed favorably by critics, and even today, there are those who disparage the picture. But most of us remember the fun and fear that the original film provided—especially if you first saw it as a kid. Even the prestigious Criterion company released a DVD of the movie as part of their line-up of classic cinema.

The film spawned a sequel years later. In 1972, actor Larry Hagman directed a comedic follow-up entitled BEWARE! THE BLOB, aka SON OF BLOB. In the pic, a piece of the Blob is discovered by an oil pipeline layer, who brings it back to suburban Los Angeles for further study. The man's wife accidentally thaws the Blob, and before long it has consumed a fly, a kitten, and the couple themselves (all while the original movie THE BLOB plays on television!). As in the original, two youngsters—Robert Walker Jr. and Gwynne Gilford (daughter of forties scream queen Anne Gwynne, and mother to current Captain Kirk Chris Pine)—try to warn people about the jelly, but no one believes them. The most memorable moment has a hippie coming to barber Shelley Berman for a haircut. Berman unknowingly fills a sink with the Blob and then dips the hippie's head into the hungry mass—taking more than just a little off the top. BEWARE! THE BLOB features lots of cameos from Hagman's actor pals, including Burgess Meredith, Dick Van Patten, Cindy Williams, Carol Lynley, Godfrey Cambridge, and

Hagman himself. The film was re-released in 1982 with the tagline "The Film that J.R. shot!"

In 1988, THE BLOB was remade, though this time the people-eater was the result of a biological warfare experiment. With more gore and much more violent deaths, this new BLOB was directed by Chuck Russell, who co-wrote the script with future WALKING DEAD showrunner Frank Darabont.

Looking back, THE BLOB may seem a bit silly and tame, but during its time, it was frightening enough to get teenage girls to cuddle with their boyfriends at the Drive-In. It's definitely a classic of the era thanks to McQueen's top-notch performance, as well as the "us vs. them" theme of the teenagers trying to convince the adults that there is an alien goo eating people. The beloved blotch is part of our culture, and there are rumors of another remake being planned. When it comes to THE BLOB, it is very doubtful that we have seen THE END...? ●



# ON THE ROAD:

## Drive-In Films and the Directors Who Saw Them

By Alexandra West

The establishment of the Drive-In may be one of humanity's great feats. With the advent of the Drive-In, society had progressed enough that the middle class could drive their personally owned cars down paved roads to enjoy a night outdoors featuring entertainment that was made to enhance this experience.

During this time, while American cinema was enjoying a renaissance of sophistication with auteurs like Alfred Hitchcock and Billy Wilder working regularly within the studio system, the B-Movie was enjoying a ride of its own. The culture of the B-Movie was about not only shock and awe, but about bringing people together. The communal aspect of the B-Movie (which could be comprised of everything from horror to the "dancing-on-the-beach" genre) was helped by the frankly often lackadaisical storytelling which allowed for conversations, interruptions, and socializing for the movie-goers. While these films were often only considered frivolous fun, a generation of filmmakers grew up with them. The monsters, fantastical stories, and special effects went beyond an evening's entertainment—they defined decades of the way audiences consumed and enjoyed movies in general.

Drive-Ins were a cultural touchstone of the baby-boomer generation. Popularized in films of the 70s and 80s as an innocent experience, Drive-Ins helped develop the B-Movie and the cultural implications

that came with it. The event of the Drive-In seeded into future filmmakers' minds and built what was originally laughable exploitation into a defining sub-genre of the 70s and 80s. While mainstream popular culture gleamed the likes of GREASE from the movement (popularized by Randal Keiser's 1978 film), horror and genre film got remakes like THE THING (1982), self-referential cult favourites like NIGHT OF THE CREEPS (1986), and monster movies like AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON (1981). These films all carried the themes of the B-Movie but tackled them in extraordinarily different ways

to reflect the culture and climate of their current times.

Fred Dekker grew up in the San Francisco Bay area and always had aspirations of being a filmmaker. From his passion for the Universal Monsters (which would become the basis of 1987's MONSTER SQUAD) to his homemade PLANET OF THE APES masks which were featured on KTVU (the same channel where NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD made its debut when he was 12), Dekker was a child of the B-Movie era and was determined to make his mark on the genre and the film industry as whole. Shortly after graduating





university with an English degree and friends like Shane Black, Dekker developed the story for what would become *HOUSE* (1986). While Dekker initially envisioned a taught psychological thriller in the vein of *THE EXORCIST*, it veered more into horror comedy territory. Genre comedies were becoming *de rigueur* in the mid-80s, so following up his work on *HOUSE* with another comedy was the quickest way to get into a director's chair.

Dekker's 1986 zombie comedy *NIGHT OF THE CREEPS* begins with a flashback to the 50s before moving to the (then) present day of the 80s. The call-back, which includes an axe-wielding psychopath, aliens, and experiments gone awry, could be out of almost any Drive-In movie of the 50s or 60s. While *NIGHT OF THE CREEPS* failed to scare up much fanfare at the box office, it did get a second life with its VHS release. The film wields its satire with a deft hand, confident that the audience has enough genre knowledge to keep up with it. *NIGHT OF THE CREEPS* is an intriguing look at the self-referential horror film long before *SCREAM* (1996) claimed the mantle.

*NIGHT OF THE CREEPS* helped bridge the gap from the initial B-Movie phenomenon to its contemporary updates. Dekker cleverly populated his film with nostalgic touchstones and savvy characters. By situating the backdrop of the tried and true B-Movie formula with intelligent

THE ULTIMATE IN ALIEN TERROR.

JOHN CARPENTER'S  
**THE THING**

MAN IS THE WARMEST PLACE TO HIDE.



**TOP LEFT: Jill Whitlow and Sigourney Weaver obviously shop at the same horror-weapons warehouse.**

**BELOW: "Holy crap, look at the size of their beer cooler!"**





characters, the formula was made fresh and engaging to audiences old and new. From the backdrop of a college campus to classic Hollywood locations like the Griffith Park Observatory (made famous by *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE*), *NIGHT OF THE CREEPS* kept the spirit of the Drive-In experience alive with the undead.

One of the most revered films of the 1950s is *THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD*, and interestingly, its remake *THE THING* (1982) is one of the most revered films of the 1980s. Following the same basic plot as the original, the remake focuses on a group of American scientists who are working in the never-ending and deadly winter of Antarctica when an alien that can assume any form invades their ranks. In this bleak science fiction setting, MacReady (Kurt Russell) leads the group through the terrifying nightmare that one among them is not who they seem. While the original worked on the larger grandiose scale of 1950s science fiction, the remake was a somber thriller delving into the minds of men facing the terrifying notions of madness and life from other planets. The 1951 version saw a group face an entity that could end humanity; the fear of nuclear war was omnipresent in the 50s, and coming off the destruction of World War II, the notion of the world ending was a real and present fear. Carpenter's *THE THING* was a much more timely meditation on what it means to be human and how fragile and vulnerable we are.

With its release in the summer of 1982, critics derided the gore, violence, and alien creature effects in the film, relegating *THE THING* to finding its audience in video rental stores. In the 1980s, America was in the grips of Reaganism, handling crises like the AIDS epidemic and the Cold War. The culture of the Drive-In B-Movie was originally about community and celebrating survival, but in the 80s it had become something darker. *THE THING* was a precursor to the body-horror movement and a dramatic shift away from happy endings and sanitized death. Auteurs and audiences were becoming increasingly familiar with scenes of destruction and violence invading homes through their televisions. Carpenter's *THE THING* updated the hopes and dreams of a nation to reflect its failures and disappointments.

The dawn of the 1980s also saw the rebirth of the werewolf subgenre. While it spawned many incarnations such as *THE*



*HOWLING* (1981), *WOLFEN* (1981), and *TEEN WOLF* (1985), none came close to touching John Landis' iconic *AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON* (1981). The film deftly combined comedy, terror, and Rick Baker's legendary effects to create a film that pays tribute to the monster's Gothic heritage with a contemporary update. When backpackers David and Jack get lost in the moors of Yorkshire, Jack is mauled and killed by a werewolf while David is merely bitten. Taken to London to recuperate, David begins to experience the signs of imminent transformation while also falling in love with a beautiful nurse.

*AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON*, like Jack and David, takes the road less traveled. Part of the lingering impact of Landis's film is that it inverts the tropes of a typical monster movie and sets them on an entirely new path. Moments of humor are followed by moments of jaw-dropping gore. Moments of terror are followed by moments of tenderness. Landis has long been a horror fan, and his oeuvre (which includes Michael Jackson's *THRILLER* music video) shows a preoccupation with the morality and humanity of the monster, something that is shared by B-level monster movies.

*AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON* partially succeeds in its B-Movie aspirations because of the two locations in its title. The theme of the journey has been a prominent one throughout genre cinema. Landis, however, has his travellers be lowly American backpackers rather than the upper-class travellers usually found in Gothic horror. The American travellers are lost in the British world, which works on the surface level of the film, enhancing the enjoyment of it and also creating an interesting parallel to the notion of the American monster wreaking havoc on the staid and contained British culture.

While many saw the Drive-In and the films it featured as frivolous knock-offs, these movies made an impact. They became part of the fabric of the American culture and an emblem of a seemingly better and more innocent time. Filmmakers of the 70s and 80s were not only dealing with the political and cultural changes of the time, but reconciling those notions with the classic perceptions of good and bad. Directors like Dekker, Carpenter, and Landis created films that use the backdrops they grew up with paired alongside the growing concerns of their time, making some of the most diverse, complex, and resonating films of their generation. C



# THE DRIVE-IN IT WILL NEVER DIE

BY MELISSA GARZA

In 1974, the epitome of the Drive-In horror film was released: **THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE**. That year, at a small Drive-In located in Western Massachusetts, my mother sat, eight months pregnant with my brother. She was horrified but too compelled to turn away.

It is in great part because of that story that I have an unending appreciation for both horror films and the spirit of the Drive-In movie theater. I would love the opportunity to sit in a car underneath the stars of a pitch black sky while watching Leatherface chase Sally Hardesty through the woods, chainsaw screeching. Unfortunately, it seems like those days are long gone; nonetheless, my mother's experience had quite an impact on my brother and I. In fact, nearly 40 years later, my brother's favorite horror movie is still the one that was playing while he was in the womb.

The 50s, 60s, and 70s were when the Drive-Ins reigned as king. Maybe it was the isolation of being in a car with only one other person or two that made the experience seem larger and more frightening than when surrounded by a packed theater. Whatever the case, the setting was able to capture audiences for decades, though over the years the film styles changed dramatically.

A decade before the iconic **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD**, the lesser known **I BURY THE LIVING** (1958) scared audiences at Drive-Ins around the country.

The film follows new cemetery director Robert Kraft who becomes obsessed with a map displaying plots within the graveyard. Each plot has either a black or a white pin on it. The black pins signify that the individual is dead, while the white shows that they're alive. Accidentally, Kraft places black pins on a young couple who purchase a plot together. Shortly thereafter, they die in an auto accident. Kraft is unsettled and decides to test the map, placing another black pin under the name of someone who is alive. Again, that person dies. The more he tests the theory, the more people die.

As Kraft places more faith into the map's capability, the larger the map gets. The design of the map is such that it appears to have deep dark eyes staring out. Of course, we're seeing it from Kraft's perspective, but these qualities are quite effective in creating a tone of fear and apprehension. There are many moments that exist only to build atmosphere—for example, shots of the graveyard when only crickets can be heard. The silence speaks volumes and the sound of crickets is simply unsettling. **I BURY THE LIVING** is a great film and definitely worth a viewing, through a windshield or otherwise.

Earlier in the 50s there was an abundance of goofy, fun, science-fiction adventures. In 1953, the cult classic **ROBOT MONSTER** hit the Drive-Ins. **ROBOT MONSTER** is sometimes considered one of the worst films of all time, and has even been riffed

on the first season of the brilliant show **MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000**. Still, it holds a special place in my heart. It opens with a young boy, Johnny, playing spaceman with his sister Carla. An alien known as Ro-Man is sent to earth by his alien brothers to dominate it. Ro-Man, who looks remarkably like a gorilla in a space helmet (and speaks perfect English), destroys everything, leaving only eight people alive, including Johnny's family. There are also alligators with fins attached and stop-motion dinosaurs, which make for great fight scenes. Though Ro-Man hasn't any issue killing the young, he falls in love with one of the remaining humans, becoming unable to hurt her. He does, however, choke out her boyfriend and carry his lady love to a cave. Ro-Man's disobedience angers his leader. The top-dog alien decides to come back and deal not only with the remaining people, but also with the disloyal Ro-Man.

In the 1960s, Drive-In horror and Sci-Fi productions went through a sort of metamorphosis, as slowly the films became more sinister in nature, took more risks, and eventually depicted realistic scenarios that captivated and terrified audiences like never before. At the beginning of the decade, a fairly innocent yet frightening and enjoyable movie entitled **HORROR HOTEL** (1960), aka **CITY OF THE DEAD**, was released. The film opens in 1692 in Whitewood, Massachusetts, where

admitted witch Evelyn Selwyn is burned at the stake by Puritans—though she laughs as she goes up in flames, declaring a pact with Lucifer. In the present day, college student Nan Barlow decides to spend her vacation studying witchcraft in Whitewood as the topic is going to be the focus of her senior paper. Upon the suggestion of her professor, she stays at a small hotel known as Raven's Inn. Soon it is revealed that the Inn's owner is actually the spirit of Evelyn and that her pact with Lucifer has worked. Nan has become the chosen sacrifice of the coven. When Nan fails to return, her brother, boyfriend, and the granddaughter of the local reverend make their way to Whitewood to find out the truth.

**HORROR HOTEL** is filled with suspense, intrigue, and moments that invoke a level of apprehension in the viewer. Even today, there are scenes that make my pulse race and chills go down my spine. It successfully captures both a **TWILIGHT ZONE** and **PSYCHO**-style atmosphere.

Throughout the 60s, there were many great Drive-In additions, but one of the best that clearly shows the transition from the subtlety of a movie like **HORROR HOTEL** to the brazenness of later times is **SCREAM BABY SCREAM**. The movie opens as an injured and agitated man named Jason is brought into the hospital. He begs the doctor to let him go back to save his girlfriend Janet. Through a series of flashbacks, we see that only two weeks prior, Jason and Janet were in an art class painting a nude model. The model is kidnapped by a blue-faced mutant who brings her to the very popular, dark, and eccentric artist Charles Butler, and the sinister and crazy Dr. Garrison. The next day, Butler shows up, although no one suspects he has had anything to do with the model's disappearance. Jason immediately dislikes him, his art, and the attention he shows to Janet. Janet, however, is in awe of Butler's creativity and work. Later, Jason and Janet decide to drop acid with a few friends. Had they all watched the Blue Boy episode of **DRAGNET**, maybe their horrifying ordeal could have been avoided. When high, Janet sees the mutant, but brushes it off as a bad trip. Soon it becomes clear that the

mutants are real, and Butler will go to any length for his art, including using unwilling human subjects.

Without question, there is a very campy level to this film. Some may argue that it's dated, but for those who enjoy the late 60s and see it as a time filled with charm and promise, it's hardly noticeable. Overall it's a fun, weird, and crazy movie but still has enough horror elements so that fans of the genre will not be disappointed.

The 70s kept the unabashed nature of the late 60s but also incorporated a more gritty feel. That isn't to say that camp disappeared entirely, but that elements not seen before were introduced. One of the most underrated Drive-In horror flicks is Bob Clark's **CHILDREN SHOULDN'T PLAY WITH DEAD THINGS**. It follows the leader of a theater group, Alan, who brings his cast members to a small island. There they visit a graveyard and conduct a satanic ritual to raise the dead. They dig up a corpse named Orville and bring him back to a cabin. There are so many bizarre elements to this film. One of the most disturbing is Alan's wedding ceremony to Orville. Eventually, the dead come alive and seek their revenge. This movie horrified me as a youngster and remains one that scares me to this day. The conclusion is perfect and keeps with the tone of the overall production.

There are plenty of other films that made the 70s a great place for the Drive-In. Little-

known gems like **WARLOCK MOON**, **ABBY**, **SHRIEK OF THE MUTILATED**, **RACE WITH THE DEVIL**, and **TOURIST TRAP** are all worthy productions to mention. Still, it wouldn't feel right to end this article with any film except **DRIVE-IN MASSACRE**, a little-known low-budget slasher that was made in 1977. The premise is simple: a killer stalks a Drive-In theater that was once a carnival. The characters are hilarious, and though there aren't any real scares, the death scenes are done quite well. Though some argue the ending is lacking, it remains quite original.

It is the hope of many that Drive-Ins will make a comeback and show these great movies the way they were intended to be seen. Until that day, we can still dream that the Drive-In will never die. ☺



**Drive-In movies became more and more macabre as the decades passed. Fare that was initially goofy (like **ROBOT MONSTER**, LEFT) gave way to the sinister **I BURY THE LIVING** (ABOVE) and **HORROR HOTEL** (TOP RIGHT).**



SCOTT SNYDER & RAFAEL ALBUQUERQUE

# TALK AMERICAN VAMPIRE SECOND CYCLE

BY HOLLY INTERLANDI

This spring marks the return of *AMERICAN VAMPIRE*, a perennial Vertigo favorite and brainchild of Scott Snyder (*BATMAN*) and Rafael Albuquerque (*ANIMAL MAN*), following a year-long hiatus. The previous run left off at Issue 34, but this one will begin right back at #1, in a move they're calling the "Second Cycle". And never fear, these vamps don't sparkle—their faces elongate and push their teeth forward like rattlesnake fangs to feed. It's creepy and affecting as hell, but it's also not the only aspect of this comic that keeps it fresh. We spoke with Snyder and Albuquerque recently to find out what makes the series tick, and how the passing of the decades has changed Pearl Jones, Skinner Sweet, and the others.

## ON WHY THE SERIES TOOK A BREAK

**Snyder:** We always knew the series was going to have a midway point when the characters broke away from each other. We wondered if we would take a couple issues off, put together a graphic novel collection, or just take a break. And we figured it would be better to take a break. Rafael had stuff that he wanted to do, and I had a lot on my plate with *SUPERMAN UNCHAINED* and all that stuff, so we decided that we'd come back to the characters after they'd actually been away from each other for almost ten years. There's an organic break in the story, and this is the longest leap we've taken

chronologically. There was a plan from the very beginning to take a breather or an intermission to have the readership feel that time pass.

## ON THE VAMPIRES BEING AMERICAN

**Snyder:** Pearl represents the determination and optimism we've come to associate with nascent American culture, while Skinner is the more rebellious, let's-burn-it-all-down outlaw, which I also think is important to our understanding of ourselves and our identity. And Calvin is there now, and there's also Mimotch, the original—the "vampire prime". I try to create characters

that have a set of characteristics that I associate, or like to associate, with American identity, even an imagined identity, and then use them as a way to explore that aspect. Is there something monstrous in being a rebellious outlaw the way Skinner is? Is there something tragic in being endlessly optimistic the way that Pearl is? They're potent because in my own perception of being American, they mean something to me. They're the things that have the strange glow, that radiate, that strike a nerve with me as something super American. Like a farmhouse, or a picket fence, or a blues club. All those things that have a strange magic to them because they're so deeply ingrained in our sense of self.

## ON VAMPIRE DESIGN

**Albuquerque:** [Scott and I] talk a lot every time we have to set up a new design. Not only for our vampires, but for everything in the book. Our process is very collaborative. As for their anatomy, I do a lot of research on very bizarre animals so we can put out something unexpected every time.

## ON THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

**Snyder:** I'm not the best artist, but I do try to thumbnail in the most basic way just to get the rhythm of it. I can't draw, but... I mean, I can draw if I really concentrate on it. I'm always threatening Rafael that I'm going to do a variant cover at some point. [laughs] I'm nowhere near good enough to actually thumbnail, but I do lay it out in tiny little squares to make sure the pacing is right. Not to give to him—I never give him anything that dictates how to do the scripts visually. I'm really light on paneling. I try to give him panels and describe them, but I never say that something is from a specific angle, or a "shot"—I don't direct it. I'll say something like, "This page is all about the creeping dread between these two characters as they realize that the scout they sent to explore the mountains is not coming back." I'll give the dialogue and a couple of visual details and emphasize how to best convey that. For myself, I thumbnail to be like, two pages, three panels; okay, Rafael has enough room.

He never sees them. The thumbnails are just for me.

## ON DECADE INFLUENCE

**Snyder:** For the arc we're coming back with, we're in 1965, so things haven't quite broken apart yet, but there is tremendous conflict over Vietnam and the generational split is happening everywhere. There's a sense of turmoil. And that's reflected in the characters' psychology and also in the narrative, in terms of what's happening with the organization that hunts vampires

and the different vampire species. They're reacting to what's happening in the country. We're seeing history through the eyes of the protagonists. At this time, both Pearl and Skinner have retreated from current events, gone back home and opted out of what's happening—both in the vampire conflict behind the scenes and in American history. She's gone back to her family farm, and she's found a new purpose that I'm really excited about that I don't want to give away. And Skinner has recreated a bloodier version of the Old West on the Mexican borderlands, where he's a notorious handit





who steals from cartels. They call him the Sugar Man because he always has his candy. No one knows who he is. They've both returned to their roots, in that they've found a semblance of happiness, but deep down they both know that they can't avoid the larger conflict coming. And that's what that time period is about, before things get really turbulent in the late 60s.

**Albuquerque:** As much as I follow the basic visual style that we set up on the book, I try, for every decade, to bring a bit of the flavor of that time, somehow. I've been doing some research on movies and art in general from the 60s to see the kind of "acting" the characters do. I even try to mimic, a bit, the vision of the artists of those days, using similar storytelling techniques every time it's possible.

## ON MUSICAL INFLUENCE

**Snyder:** The Grey Trader, whom we sort of introduced in Issue 34 but has been in the design of the series from the beginning, is based on our version of the devil. He's the guy that a lot of the bloodline traces back to, and he's responsible for a lot of myth and folklore—both in European culture and in American popular culture. So there's a lot

of devil at the crossroads, Robert Johnson, and those songs... I love early American music and its interpretation of the devil—it's definitely in the DNA of this character and the bloodlines that he inspires. Rafael and I actually made playlists for each decade to give to each other. For the 50s it was all rockabilly stuff, from the Collins Kids to Elvis's Sun Sessions to Little Richard. And crooner stuff, too. I have a strange fixation with doo-wop music and unknown bands that never made it, and there's a great series called Rare Black Doo-Wop, and there's another one called Rare White Doo-Wop. I have many, many volumes of them. I love combing through them and giving Rafael all kinds of odds and ends. Same with the early American stuff—I'm a huge fan of everything from Jimmy Rogers and the Carter Family to the country music of the 60s. It's my old man fascination. In the upcoming arc, one of the major figures is a spangly country singer. He's called the Signal Man. There is a lot of music in **AMERICAN VAMPIRE**. I wish we could put out a CD for every arc.

## ON TWENTIETH CENTURY ICONOGRAPHY

**Snyder:** Pearl was born in the year 1900. Her experience is sort of meant to be the



experience of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Skinner is reborn as a vampire at the closing of the frontier. I feel our monsters are modern in that they're both built on modern iconography—Pearl is a flapper, and they're considered the modern woman of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the time, it was kind of a startling image to be suddenly considered the feminine standard. Even Skinner as the outlaw of the late 1800s. They're the ideas that introduce for us the idea of modern iconography, even though a lot of them have become things that we're so familiar with, like a doo-wop singer. But an integrated doo-wop group, like the one that Calvin's brother is in in the "Nocturne" cycle, was incredibly progressive at the time. And now it's iconic. So we're trying to do that along the way. With Travis Kidd in the rockabilly arc, for example—he's that image of someone who was a totally transgressive rock and roll bad boy. It was something new and startling at the time that has now become iconic. We try to build our protagonists, whether they're vampires or humans, out of things that have become iconic and representative of modern culture, but at the time were completely subversive, new, and modern.

## ON ASSOCIATIONS WITH OTHER SERIES

**Snyder:** I think a lot of people associate me with Batman and Superman, but I've written more issues of *AMERICAN VAMPIRE* than anything else, and it's what started me in comics. It's sort of my baby. Rafael co-parents it.

**Albuquerque:** I think *AMERICAN VAMPIRE* influenced *ANIMAL MAN* more than the opposite. I could test out some techniques in *ANIMAL MAN* that I would never try if I hadn't tried something similar in *AMERICAN VAMPIRE* before.

## ON TACKLING THE MODERN AGE

**Snyder:** We have a plan for the modern age, too. The series ends in the modern age. It's always been less about trying to wrench the characters in the story toward things that are emblematic of the time period, and more about experiencing the time period through them. Like, as fun as it would be to do "Thriller" or a sort of high school *BREAKFAST CLUB* vampire story—and I would love to do



those things—it's more about trying to figure out where the characters would be emotionally, and where the bigger conflict is and using that as a kind of compass by which you determine how much to show of the era.

## ON CHARACTER NAMES

**Snyder:** I love coming up with names. Our editor Mark is always teasing me that I spend way too much time on it. But it's important to me, because it's almost weird how people have names that reflect their professions half the time. Like Usan

Bolt. The way that Elvis had such an odd name, but that it became iconic. Picking the names out is a lot of fun, and I want it to be memorable, and I want it to be emblematic of who the character is.

## ON EXPECTATIONS

**Snyder:** I hope the expectations are high! We're really delivering with this one. I'm really proud of it. It's the second half of this series that I'm really thrilled about. We're introducing characters that are based on my favorite icons from American culture. ☺

# LET IT XOM-B:

AUTHOR JEREMY ROBINSON UNLEASHES HIS LATEST POST-APOCALYPTIC SCI-FI ADVENTURE ON MANKIND

BY ED BLAIR

I'm a Jeremy Robinson fan; let's just get that out of the way. Jeremy writes books that I want to read. Not books that I *have* to read or that some list has deemed "important", but books that keep me turning pages until sunlight starts trickling through my window and I realize I've missed another night of sleep. His writing style would best be described as blending the white-knuckled pace of an Edgar Rice Burroughs or a Doc Savage novel with the scientific adventurism of Michael Crichton, mixed with a dash of Verne and Lovecraft. His stories sound like the really cool ideas writers and directors have for projects before a team of executives "focus group" the idea into a plain, vanilla mass featuring an orangutan (because, you know, orangutans are testing well this week).

The only pace more intense than his stories is the one he keeps as an author. Last year he authored/co-authored 14 novels. This year he'll be releasing another five. Talk about an author who keeps his readers on their toes. It's not often a writer can outpace his audience while firing out one page-turner after another. He's written a wide variety of genre fare. His ANTARKTOS series focuses on modern day Antarctica thawing and releasing entire armies of biblical creatures upon the earth. CHESS TEAM—arguably his most notable series—centers on a team of Delta commandos traveling the world fighting monsters ripped straight from history, mythology, and the movies. He's tackled time travel (DIDYMUS CONTINGENCY), space exploration (BENEATH), inter-dimensional rifts (REFUGE), and he's three books deep into his kaiju series, PROJECT

NEMESIS—the tale of a government project that has created giant monsters with human souls that battle one another and humanity while cutting a path of destruction that would make Godzilla blush. But with his newest novel, XOM-B, he's looking to put his own spin on post-apocalyptic Sci-Fi by creating a unique blend of elements with some huge surprises.

I've read XOM-B and it really is a fantastic piece of modern Sci-Fi writing. I enjoyed it so much that I forced Jeremy to stop writing for a few minutes to share a bit about his stories, his influences, and how it all started for him.

**Famous Monsters.** Like most superheroes—and I think releasing 14 books in a year qualifies—you have a pretty fascinating origin story, one in which being an author wasn't really part of the plan.

**Jeremy Robinson.** It's true. I drew a lot when I was young. And the more I drew the more I realized that my art was telling some big stories. So the plan was to write screenplays, because film includes visuals and music and monsters and all the things I love. I did the Hollywood thing for three years until I realized that the chances of getting a movie made from something I wrote were better if I wrote a novel than if I wrote a screenplay. So I started writing novels on 2003. After we moved back to New Hampshire, I wrote three more novels. In 2005, I decided to self-publish the first of them, THE DIDYMUS CONTINGENCY, and it became a Barnes & Noble bestseller. At that point I realized that if I did enough of them, I could actually make a living.

The next year I started my own imprint called Breakneck Press and published

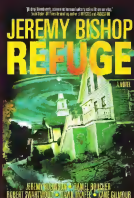
four of my own books. I used three of my own credit cards to support my family for six months, and I had a son on the way. By Dec 2007, I had no money at all and was basically doomed. And then the "Christmas Miracle" happened, and all four books, at almost the same time, started to sell really well. Since then I've been a full-time author.

**FM.** Your stories seem to have a wide array of pop culture and historical references and influences in them. What are the inspirational wellsprings you draw from when writing?

**JR.** The formative years of my creativity were between the ages of 5 and 13, growing up just north of Boston. Every Saturday we had a Creature Double Feature where I spent a lot of time watching Godzilla and a lot of Ray Harryhausen. Those were, and still are, my main influences. There's even a scene in my novel THRESHOLD where a bunch of skeletons get animated by the antagonist and the hero says, "He's going all Ray Harryhausen on us!" I make a point to try and reference in my work the books and movies that influenced me.

**FM.** That would explain why you're one of the few people who actually tackled writing a genuine kaiju series (PROJECT NEMESIS, ISLAND 731, PROJECT MAIGO).

**JR.** Absolutely! Godzilla has always been one of my main creative forces. Growing up, when I was doing my art, there were always a lot of Godzilla drawings around. I think people are afraid to tackle it because they think something that big, and maybe unrealistic, only belongs on the big screen. But the conclusion I came to was that the really good kaiju movies were morality



tales, and that the creatures were often there as a result of the hubris of man. It says, "You play with this kind of force and this is what happens."

FM. As much as I enjoyed the kaiju novels, there is just something about the CHESS TEAM series. The idea of a Delta squad fighting monsters and hunting treasures—it's like Arnold and his team from PREDATOR living in the Indiana Jones universe.

JR. That's exactly how I describe it. It was a result of the publisher coming to me in 2007 and, having really enjoyed ANTARKTOS RISING, asking if I could do something exactly like that but have no religion in it. So I came up with this idea that deals with Delta operators that handle the weirdest of the weird threats the world has to offer—usually creatures from mythology somehow brought to life, or brought back, through science—which shows my Harryhausen roots a lot. The team faces off against the Hydra, the skeletons, the Colossus, all sorts of Harryhausen things throughout the series. It was a way for me to explore these mythologies I've always enjoyed in an explosive way with these Delta Force operators that are almost super human. Almost. [Laughs]

FM. I have to say, when you approached me about XOM-B, you caught me off guard because you were very clear about saying that it is, hands down, your best book yet.

JR. I feel bad for my other books saying that XOM-B is better than all of them. But it is. The subject matter is familiar, but also very unique. It's not a type of twist that exists in all storytelling. But that twist has made it difficult to explain the story to someone without giving too much away.

So you'll just have to believe me. [Laughs] I like exciting stories, but I like them even more when there's a moral story involved, when they make you think.

Without ruining it, it's a near-future post-apocalyptic novel where a race of people known as The Masters has been wiped out and their freed slaves have inherited the earth. But now The Masters are coming back and unleashing a virus onto the population. There are robots and zombies and future tech, all with an underlying civil rights theme running throughout. I think that combination makes it very unique.

FM. I'm guessing that with five books scheduled for this year and another five for the next, you don't consider "not being inspired" a legitimate reason not to sit down and start writing?

JR. [Laughs] No. Absolutely not.

And like Keyser Soze, Jeremy Robinson vanished—likely back to his keyboard where he's working—on a novel to be released next year. He's also got a short film in the works that will serve as a prequel/proof-of-concept to one of his upcoming novels. And studios have been circling, as his style of comic-influenced, sequel-ready storytelling is the future of filmmaking. It's only a matter of time before one of these books finds their way to the big screen. Time to get yourself ahead of the curve.

To dig deeper into Jeremy and his formidable catalog of books, head on over to <http://www.jeremyrobinsononline.com/>.



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# WAYWARD SONS

BY RISTI KAY



"DAD'S ON A HUNTING TRIP, AND HE HASN'T BEEN HOME IN A FEW DAYS."

To fans of the long-running show *SUPERNATURAL*, this line is synonymous with the opening lines of "Carry On Wayward Son" by Kansas—a song often interwoven with the show's storyline. *There'll be peace when you are done*. It conjures up images of a '67 Chevy Impala flying down the road; and if you listen carefully, you can hear the rattling of the Legos shoved into its radiator. *Lay your weary head to rest*. Hundreds of dingy motel rooms across America that all seem to hlur together. *Don't you cry no more*. This is the whispered prayer of an absentee-father god who is the worst example of a deadbeat dad the show has to offer—and that's saying something.

But let's back up a bit for the uninitiated, shall we?

*SUPERNATURAL* is the story of two brothers, Sam and Dean Winchester, who were raised as Hunters—of ghosts, demons, and anything else that goes hump in the night. Their father, John Winchester (played in supporting stunts by Jeffrey Dean Morgan), chose this life for them after the three barely escaped with their lives from a house fire that started when John's wife Mary was burned alive while pinned to the ceiling of Sam's nursery by some unknown force. John Winchester made it his mission in life to get vengeance for this act—something he passed on to his sons, and something they continue after his

death early on in the series.

It's not quite as simple as that, though. Road-tripping across the country fighting monsters lifted right from classic urban legends quickly gave way to a larger mythology.

Don't confuse *SUPERNATURAL* with the current crop of teen-focused paranormal thrillers. Debuting in September of 2005 on The WB, the first episode of *SUPERNATURAL* aired right around the same time as the original *TWILIGHT* novel hit the shelves, which kicked off the trend of glittering, gentle-hearted monsters. *SUPERNATURAL*, on the other hand, shares more in common with earlier series like *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER* (also on The WB) and *THE X-FILES*. Monsters are monsters on *SUPERNATURAL*, and while the show occasionally redeems one or two, the mythology of the show spends more time suggesting that all humans are capable of being monsters than the idea that all monsters also have a dose of humanity. After all, demons on *SUPERNATURAL* begin as tortured, once-human souls; and vampires, werewolves, and wendigos are all born human.

This theme is examined largely through the multi-season character arc surrounding Sam Winchester. In the show's second season, it is revealed that the Yellow-Eyed Demon—the monster who killed Mary

Winchester that night in the nursery—was actually there to feed baby Sam some demon blood, in the hopes of conditioning him to later take on a sort of antichrist role. At first it appears that Sam was just one of many "special" children, chosen seemingly at random, who were fed blood as a child, which led to them developing psychic powers as adults. In the Season Two finale, they are all forced to fight to the death in a manner that might seem reminiscent of *THE HUNGER GAMES* until you realize that that book wouldn't be released for months after the episode aired.

In later seasons, it is explained that this was all just a cover for the "bigger plan"—a way to keep the minions doing what they needed to do while the big boys played a long game in the background. Sam Winchester comes from a bloodline that makes him a perfect host for Lucifer—yes, *that* Lucifer: the fallen archangel who was the father of all demons but had been locked away from both Hell and Earth for millennia. Basically, everyone on the show has deadbeat daddy issues, including all the other angels. In fact, it could be argued that the angels and demons set out to cause the apocalypse because, well, "Dad's gone on a hunting trip and he hasn't been home in a few days."

Meanwhile, Dean is touched by an angel of his own (although not as literally as some fans keep insisting). The fight to the





**Mary Winchester's death (RIGHT) is the catalyst for her husband's obsession with the supernatural—an obsession that complicates his sons' perceptions of him (ABOVE).**

death at the end of Season Two actually ends with Sam dying. Temporarily, at least. Dean makes a demon's deal to save Sam's life, and in return is given one year to live. Sam and Dean spend the year trying to find a way to get out of the bargain, but it's no use, and Dean is ripped to shreds by hellhounds while his soul is strung up on a rack in Hell. It's the angel Castiel who rescues Dean from Hell. Why? Because Dean is needed to be a host for Michael, another archangel, who wants to throw Lucifer back into the pit—but only after the events of the apocalypse take place. Oh, and this is apparently what God wants.

Dean, who grew up aware of all the monsters and demons and other crap in the world, is thrown by the idea that there is a God and angels, because if there was a guy supposedly on their side the whole time, then why are their lives as awful as they have been? What use could he possibly have for a God like that? And what exactly are angels but yet another breed of monsters trying to interfere in his life? (The angels, for the record, are perhaps most terrifying in their utter lack of humanity.)

The heart of the show, and the thing that has kept it going for nine years, is Sam and

Dean. Somehow, through everything that's been thrown at them (or in them), they have retained their humanity. Eric Kripke, the show's creator, has spoken about how in his initial outline, Sam was the Luke Skywalker character, while Dean was Han Solo—the classic Messiah and Everyman combo. As the show has evolved over the years, however, we have seen Sam cling to his humanity, putting the idea of *normalcy* up on a pedestal as something that he worships even while realizing he will never quite achieve it. Dean, on the other hand, for all his blue collar witticisms and classic rock references, has transcended the fate that God and/or the show writers originally intended for him. This isn't to say that he's lost his humanity, but the last two seasons have shown that when he's separated from Sam, he comes the closest to turning into nothing more than a monster killing other monsters. The same could be said about Sam, although we saw that more in earlier seasons for him.

SUPERNATURAL is, at its core, codependent on Sam and Dean. (The show frequently goes "meta" and has characters comment on the brothers' codependency, going as far as to refer to it as "psychotically,



irrationally, erotically codependent.") It might be named after the creatures they fight, but the weakest moments of the series come when it wanders away from Sam and Dean and their relationship. Throughout the seasons they have died for each other, but more importantly, they have *lived* for each other, even when it meant giving up the chance to close the gates of Hell. The success of these two characters comes not only from the writing, but from the chemistry of actors Jared Padalecki (Sam) and Jensen Ackles (Dean). There is no one who loves Sam and Dean more than the men who play them, and this dedication shows through on screen.

The concepts behind the mythology of SUPERNATURAL are not original, but the irreverent-yet-respectful approach to the genre is one of the things that sets the show apart and allows it to continue evolving. SUPERNATURAL is very aware of where



**Sam and Dean exorcising a demon from its human host, as they often do on Friday nights.**

it sits in genre television, and is self-aware enough that rather than just riffing on classic horror tropes for its *Monster of the Week* episodes, it goes all out in paying homage to them (see “Supernatural’s Horror Homages” in this issue).

It’s not just the horror genre that gets riffed on the show, either. In “Changing Channels”, the trickster angel Gabriel takes Sam and Dean through a series of alternate universes where they are forced to act out various television genres—including several that just happen to closely resemble the shows airing on other networks during the same timeslot as *SUPERNATURAL*. After the writer’s strike interrupted production in Season Three, the first episode to air when the show returned was a spoof on reality television, with Sam and Dean playing a supporting role to a group of “Ghostifiers” filming the pilot of their reality show. Both of these episodes, however, and others like them, fit seamlessly into the mythology of the show rather than standing out as “joke” episodes. *SUPERNATURAL* will make you laugh, yes, but only to make it hurt that much worse later on.

What’s perhaps most impressive is when the show eventually turned the camera on itself. When Sam and Dean first find out that there is an author out there writing a series of books called *Supernatural* where

two characters named Sam and Dean go out and chase monsters, it sounds like a cheap ploy meant to get laughs. It turns out, however, that the author, Chuck, is actually a prophet of God, and a central figure in the apocalypse storyline. He is, in essence, writing “The Gospels of Sam and Dean”—he just isn’t aware of it. Neither are the fans who write fanfiction and hold conventions and roleplay Sam and Dean (the ones in the story, that is—Chuck’s books have a fictitious fanbase). This, of course, is all totally separate from the episode when a different angel sends them to a different alternate universe... one in which everyone thinks Sam and Dean are actors with weird names like Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles and that they’re not hunters but actors on a TV show called *SUPERNATURAL*. It’s a level of meta that most shows would collapse under, but *SUPERNATURAL* just rolls with it and acts like it’s no more noteworthy than angels and demons and ghosts and monsters being real—and really, when you put it that way, it’s not.

After floundering slightly with where to go with the show after having Sam and Dean stop the apocalypse, the show found a new rhythm towards the end of Season Eight, which has continued into Season Nine and will continue into a tenth season, as was recently confirmed. Season Eight

saw Sam and Dean battle it out against both the remaining angels and a host of demons led by the quick-witted and sharp-tongued Crowley (Mark Sheppard). Joining forces with Castiel (Misha Collins), they seek to find a way to close the gates to both Heaven and Hell, which would leave only the relatively harmless run-of-the-mill ghosts and ghouls. That is, if it works. Which it doesn’t. When Dean finds out that the final stage would kill Sam, he pulls the cord on the whole thing, letting Sam know once and for all that there is nothing he won’t do for him. Meanwhile, Cas is duped, and while he locks the gates of Heaven, it is not before all the remaining angels in heaven are booted down to earth... with the door locked behind them.

The current season has seen Sam and Dean dealing with the aftermath, as the angels treat Earth the way a group of arrogant teenagers would treat a playground. Not only that, but in trying to once again save Sam’s life, Dean makes a deal with an angel that has him tricking Sam into letting the angel possess him. This season has also seen both Castiel and Crowley struggle with being just a little bit closer to human than they ever have been before. Sam and Dean are still working out what it means to be legacies of an apparent secret Hunters’ society called the Men of Letters. Plus, we see a callback to an earlier throwaway reference that Sam and Dean are the descendants of Cain and Abel (a reason for them to play host to Lucifer and Michael!) with the introduction of Cain. In the *SUPERNATURAL* world, Cain made a deal to save his brother Abel’s soul for Heaven... and in exchange sold his own soul to Hell. If this sounds familiar, it should, and shortly afterwards we see Cain pass his mark (and his powers) to Dean.

Nine seasons in, and there is still a lot of story left to be told in the *SUPERNATURAL* universe. So much so that a backdoor pilot (read: potential spinoff, entitled *SUPERNATURAL: TRIBES*) is airing towards the end of this season. Season Ten is now officially a go. Beyond that? Who knows. If the show does continue, it will be because of the passion and dedication of the show’s relatively small yet incredibly loyal fanbase—fans who might have come for the monsters, but stayed for Sam, Dean, and their struggle to fight the monsters who threaten the world without becoming monsters themselves. ●

# BOBBY'S WORLD: AN INTERVIEW WITH JIM BEAVER

BY ED BLAIR

While *SUPERNATURAL*'s Winchester brothers have always been the show's wayward sons, it is fellow hunter Bobby Singer who has proven time and again to be the North Star that guides them home (both literally and morally). Veteran actor Jim Beaver was brought on to play the role of Singer, originally intended to be a much smaller part. But through a bit of serendipity, combined with overwhelming fan response to the character, Bobby Singer has become an essential part of the narrative.

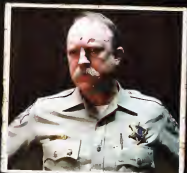
Seemingly constructed from the mold of Gene Autry's "Cowboy Code", Singer is a no-nonsense, tough-talking, loyal-to-a-fault mentor for the boys. A fellow hunter who knows the trials and tribulations of life on the hunt, Singer is the first to offer the boys sage advice while also not being afraid to put them in their place whenever they veer towards the moral abyss. He works diligently to balance his roles as elder, surrogate father, and friend. He's also proven time and again that there is no price too steep to keep the brothers safe, even it means sacrificing his life. Bobby is the Obi-Wan to the brothers' Luke and Han routine.

It's a role that seems almost custom made for the Wyoming-born, Texas-raised Beaver. While the actor has shown his versatility on both stage and screen, his turn as the rugged-but-loyal Ellsworth on the critically acclaimed series *DEADWOOD*, and his portrayal of small town Sheriff Shelby Parlow in the Elmore Leonard series *JUSTIFIED*, have cemented his "tough guy with a heart of gold" cred. While, by his own admission, Beaver may not be quite the two-fisted man of action that Bobby Singer is, there's no denying the actor brings much to the role that has allowed the character to become one of the undeniably driving elements in a show poised to enter its tenth season. Beaver was kind enough to take time away from filming

on his current feature (more on that later) to chat about *SUPERNATURAL*, the little show that could.

**Famous Monsters.** When the character of Bobby Singer was first introduced, it didn't seem clear whether or not he was destined for greater things. What was the original plan for Bobby, and how did he evolve to become the beating heart of the show, the one true constant and father figure in the Winchester brothers' lives?

**Jim Beaver.** Originally, Bobby was a replacement for a single episode for which Loretta Devine, as Missouri, wasn't available. They needed a veteran hunter the boys could go to for advice and assistance, and since Loretta's schedule didn't allow it to be Missouri, they came up with the idea of a kind of redneck white guy. Bobby was only intended for one episode, and that's all I expected to play. But when it became clear that Jeffrey Dean Morgan's schedule wasn't giving him enough space to continue as John Winchester, I think the producers/writers decided the boys needed someone to fill that spot, and Bobby was a natural fit. To tell the truth, I don't know how he evolved to become anything, even "the beating heart of the show," which is something I would never claim. It just seems that both the writers and the fans began to fall in love with the character's crusty wisdom and sarcastic but warm way of redirecting Sam and Dean. It's a perfect kind of character, one that has been repeatedly popular in movies and other shows, and it doesn't surprise me that people took to him. It just kind of surprises me that it's me playing him! But how he evolved, how the writers developed him, is really unknown to me. It has never happened that they have asked my input on the character, or told me in advance how the relationship would grow. I found out pretty much the





**"We're gonna need a bigger gun."**

same way the audience did, by learning the story of each episode. I wasn't privy to the thought processes by which Eric and the writing staff grew the character.

**FM.** It feels... that characters like DEADWOOD's Ellsworth, JUSTIFIED's Sheriff Shelby, and especially Bobby Singer, all contain certain elements of what people would expect from someone like yourself, who was born in Wyoming and raised in Texas—certain no-nonsense, straight talking, get-down-to-business characteristics. How much of yourself is reflected in Bobby Singer, and has it evolved over the seasons of SUPERNATURAL where you've maybe been able to shape the character a bit more?

**JB.** I like to think I'm a lot like Bobby, and in some ways I am. He's a caring person, and I like to think I am. He's impatient with idiots (or idjits), and I am, too. But he's much more straightforward and bold and brave than I am. I think he's picked up a few of my characteristics, and with luck, I've picked up a few of his. I do think his colorful colloquial style is very similar to mine, though the writers are better at coming up with great lines than I am.

**FM.** You've starred in quite a few acclaimed films and TV series, but SUPERNATURAL is one that just keeps rolling along and continues to gain more

and more loyal and passionate fans every day, while preparing to wrap up its ninth season. You and the team get some of the most incredible crowds that wait all night just to get a chance to see you at San Diego Comic-Con. The commitment is incredible. As the show preps to cross into Season Ten, something that puts it in rarefied company as one of the longest running prime time dramas in TV history, what is it about the show, to you, that is so special that people keep finding it, loving it, watching it, and setting the internet ablaze fretting over all of your characters' fates?

**JB.** Years ago, at a fan convention, some fans told me something I've never forgotten. They said they would watch SUPERNATURAL even if it weren't scary and didn't have monsters. That really struck me as intriguing. What they said was that the real hook for them was the relationships between the brothers and the inner circle, and it was that, even more than the thrills and frights, that kept them coming back season after season. I think there's something to that. There are lots of scary shows, and there are lots of shows with hunky, good-looking guys, but somehow most of those shows don't last the way SUPERNATURAL has. Heart. That's what I think it's got that's missing from shows with shorter life spans. Heart, and a sense that these characters all care for each other. Sure, there's smart writing and great

effects and the stories are generally very compelling. But at the heart is heart.

**FM.** As an actor, when you live with a character as long as you've lived with Bobby Singer, what have you done over the various seasons to keep the character fresh, to keep yourself challenged, to bring something new or dynamic to the table?

**JB.** I don't really have to do much to keep Bobby fresh. The writers do that. I just show up and say the lines! But the fact is they've been very good at giving me lines and stories that I can't help but seem fresh and invigorated doing. They started out using Bobby as a foil for the boys, and then began to reveal bits and pieces of his past and his persona, and it's those revelations that have kept the character fresh—not anything I've done. I pick up a new script and find myself thinking, "Oh, wow, look, a new facet, a new color to play with!" I'm very dependent, and happily so, on the people who write the show. For me the challenge is not in developing the character, but in living up to the developments the writers provide.

**FM.** Based on various outtakes and interviews, the feeling seems to be that SUPERNATURAL is a lot of fun to work on, that it has a good energy. How have your experiences been?

**JB.** Though we work hard and with real

commitment on *SUPERNATURAL*, it is nevertheless one of the most loosey-goosey sets I've ever been on. People always ask about pranks, as if we're always creating intricate ways to trick or humiliate each other. It's not really that. It's more that no one on our set is afraid to laugh, or afraid to do something to make others laugh. We're professional (generally!), but there's a real camaraderie and light-hearted attitude among cast and crew. We've all known each other so long, too, that there's great freedom to yank each other's chains, to puncture each other's balloons, and to put as much effort into enjoying the process as in the process itself. I've never had more fun on a set than on the *SUPERNATURAL* set. And, yeah, I miss it. A lot.

**FM.** Many classic FM fans are skeptical of newer monster movies and shows these days, especially as CG grows and the days of Jack Pierce monsters fade away. Heck, it took me until Season Three to catch up with *SUPERNATURAL* because I was leery of it being a CW show that was geared towards teens. But when I finally jumped in, I was blown away by how carefully the shows were constructed, and how much was built upon classic horror and monster films while also embracing a darker, grittier storytelling. As a monster kid yourself, one who grew up reading FM, you are perfectly qualified to explain to our classic readership, if you will, why *SUPERNATURAL* is a show they should dig in to.

**JB.** While CG is a major part of our show—and has to be, since our schedule rarely allows for the time required to create realistic makeup and effects the way Jack Pierce and Ray Harryhausen and the masters of old did—there's still a sense of trying to make things as believable as possible. Even though the great monsters played by Karloff and Chaney and Lugosi were restricted by the very fact that they were humans in makeup and therefore couldn't really rip people limb from limb, there was always a sense that we in the audience were seeing something kind of real, that real hands were touching real objects, and real faces were making real expressions, even if those expressions came through pounds of makeup. What *SUPERNATURAL* tries to do is to be as sensorily convincing as the old stuff, even though much of it has to be created differently now. Much of what made the

old monsters convincing was the sense that there were real, live personalities within them, and I think that's where we've been particularly successful, in investing even the weirdest creatures (however created) with personalities and recognizable traits, so that it's never just computer pixels threatening us. And of course, the writers and producers respect the old ways and the old movies and styles, as I think we've shown several times in the past, especially in the episodes that directly refer to the old Universal horror movies. I think there's an effort on the part of the show's creators to be part of the continuum of those traditions, and not simply to exist in a vacuum as though those traditions didn't exist.

**FM.** I would be remiss if I didn't ask if you have any early memories of reading or finding *Famous Monsters* back in the day. It's always fun for us to document all the lives that it touched, even if ever so briefly. **JB.** I grew up in the heyday of *Famous Monsters* and *Screen Thrills Illustrated*, which came, I believe, from the same publisher [James Warren]. I actually owned every issue of STI, but I had a lot of FM issues, too. I learned so much about actors and films that still mean something to me today, especially things about films I couldn't yet see. I knew about Rondo Hatton long before I ever got to see one of his movies, and that's because of FM. (I had a deformed cat named Rondo Kitten once.) Of course, the Karloff, Lugosi, Chaney movies, and the Hammer stuff (which I never got into the way I did the

Universal films) were pretty easily available to see even then. But if not for FM, I'd have known almost nothing about the senior Lon Chaney, because stills and articles from FM were my only source of information. I had no idea how to see the silent Chaney films, so I reveled in the pictures and dreamed of the day I'd see the actual films. Forry's puns were a little much sometimes (and I say that coming from a family of inveterate punsters), but the good humor with which all this material was presented was a large part of the draw of FM. And whoever was doing those great paintings for the covers was amazing. [Ed. Note: Jim is probably referring to FM legend Basil Gogos.] I had several of them framed on my bedroom walls. Great stuff. Great memories.

**FM.** I've no doubt, based on your current project, that you're destined to return to the pages of FM in the very near future. Is there any chance we could get you to tell the readers what you're working on at the moment?

**JB.** Right now I'm working on a big-budget horror movie from Guillermo del Toro—my first horror movie! It's called *CRIMSON PEAK*, and it stars Mia Wasikowska (*JANE EYRE*, *LAWLESS*), Jessica Chastain (*ZERO DARK THIRTY*, *MAMA*), Tom Hiddleston (*Loki*, *THE AVENGERS*), and Charlie Hunnam (*PACIFIC RIM*, *SONS OF ANARCHY*). The sets and costumes are amazing, and the creature effects are going to be stunning. We start shooting February 10, for three months, with release scheduled for October 2015. I'm very excited. ●



# THE BEST AND FREAKIEST OF SUPERNATURAL'S ABUNDANT HORROR HOMAGES

COMPILED BY SUE ASHWORTH

Supernatural is rich in pop culture references of all kinds, and very definitively inhabits the present day. Because the show is essentially based on horror tropes, it is full of allusions, shout-outs, and homages to the horror genre. When I began to explore some of the references, I was amazed at how numerous, varied, and witty they are. I began by looking at some of the choices made by the various directors to emulate cinematic styles found within the horror genre, and I picked out some of my favorite cues, verbal and non-verbal, that keep viewers of the show on their toes.

## UNIVERSAL MONSTERS

- When Bobby's dead wife is mysteriously brought back in the episode "Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid", Dean announces that he won't "leave Bobby alone with the Bride of Frankenstein." The Bride (Elsa Lanchester), of course, was created from a reanimated female corpse.
- A classic song by Bauhaus, "Bela Lugosi's Dead", is played in the episode "Live Free or Twi Hard" (and also in the 1983 vampire movie *THE HUNGER*).
- The entire episode "Monster Movie" is shot in classic Universal black and white. When Sam approaches a theater, ominous organ music is being played, much like in Universal's *THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA*.
- The shapeshifter in "Monster Movie", played by Todd Stashwick, borrowed directly from Bela Lugosi's performance in the 1931 *DRACULA* movie. He mimicked Lugosi's speech patterns and the way that he held his cloak over his face. In a way, it also references *PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE* (1959) in that Lugosi, who had been starring in that movie, died before it was completed, and a new actor was pressed into service and held his cloak over his face to hide the fact that he wasn't, in fact, Lugosi.
- The love for *Dracula* continues: the vampire shapeshifter calls Dean "Mr. Harker" and refers to Jamie as "Mina" (the two main characters from Bram Stoker's original novel). When Sam comes to the rescue, the shapeshifter calls him "Van Helsing". And just for good measure, he announces, "It was beauty killed the beast," which is the last line from the original *KING KONG*.





## STEPHEN KING NOVELS

- In the episode "Playthings", the low tracking of the camera through the halls of the hotel is very much an homage to a scene in Stanley Kubrick's *THE SHINING* (based on the King novel).
- In "I Believe the Children Are Our Future", the movie the babysitter is watching on the TV is *CUJO*—an adaptation of the Stephen King classic about a rabid dog that corrals a family in their car. Interestingly enough, *CUJO* was produced in 1983 by Robert Singer—the Executive Producer of *SUPERNATURAL*.
- The scene in "Lazarus Rising" that has Dean on his return from hell, pushing his way through the dirt (which according to Jensen was made from Oreo cookie crumbs!) hands first to escape from his grave, was borrowed from the 1976 film version of Stephen King's novel *CARRIE*.
- The monster in "Everyone Loves a Clown" is a *rakshasha*, a clown-like horror that emulates Pennywise from Stephen King's *IT*.
- Chuck the Prophet refers to a Stephen King novel in "The Monster at the End of This Book" (the title of which is in itself a reference to a children's book about Grover). Chuck is an author, and he thinks Sam and Dean will torture him and make him write something for them, just as the plot goes in *MISERY*. (Later, he says, "That's like M. Night [Shyamalan] level douchiness," when he refers to self insertion into his own stories. Ouch.)



## THE X-FILES

- In "Tall Tales", the cinematography showing the frat boy's abduction by aliens is done in the style of *THE X-FILES*. That particular episode was written by John Shiban, who was also one of the writers for *THE X-FILES*.
- In "Monster Movie", Jamie says: "So, you guys are like Mulder and Scully or something, and the X-Files are real?" Dean responds, "No, *THE X-FILES* is a TV show. This is real."



## THE EVIL DEAD

- Ash from the *Roadhouse* is named for the hero of *EVIL DEAD*, and in "Devil's Trap", the scene with the book flipping through pages without human involvement during the exorcism of the demon is a direct reference to the *Evil Dead* movies.
- In "Motel Hell", as he fishes a couple of eyeballs out of a pot of soup, Dean directly quotes Bruce Campbell as Ash in *ARMY OF DARKNESS* when he says, "All right, you primitive screwheads, listen up."
- In the episode "Weekend at Bobby's", Marcy tells Bobby that she loves scary movies and says, "Hey, have you seen *DRAG ME TO HELL*?"—which was directed by Sam Raimi of *EVIL DEAD* fame.



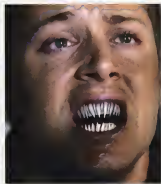
## OTHER 80s MOVIES

- ❖ When Dean is killed by the hellhounds and shown in the leadout to "No Rest for the Wicked", he is hanging in a void, bound by chains and meat hooks, which definitely evokes some of the scenes from *HELLRAISER*.
- ❖ Death by drowning in a bathtub of holy water, featured in the 80s classic *THE LOST BOYS*, is emulated by Dean when he drowns Lust in a similar way in the Season Three opener, "The Magnificent Seven". Also, we discover in "Live Free or Twi Hard" that an unlucky newly-created vampire can have the disease reversed if he kills the vampire who turned him before he's had his first feed of blood. Dean has to go through that process to be healed. This was first mentioned in Bram Stoker's *DRACULA*, and then referred to again in *THE LOST BOYS*.
- ❖ In the Halloween episode "It's the Great Pumpkin, Sam Winchester", there is a scene in which a girl bobbing for apples has her face boiled alive—a scene also depicted in *HALLOWEEN 2*.
- ❖ In "Dream a Little Dream of Me", Sam warns against taking too much of the dream root, asserting that "You take enough of it with enough practice, you become a regular Freddy Krueger."
- ❖ From "Dark Side of the Moon": "Don't go into the light," says Castiel. Dean replies, "Okay, thanks, Carol-Anne." In the modern classic *POLTERGEIST*, when the psychic is trying to bring Carol-Anne back from the dimension she was pulled into through the TV set, she warns her not to go into the light.
- ❖ The episode featuring the "Ghostfacers" riffs on reality shows that stake out supposedly haunted environments to search for spirits, and the main characters and episode titles—such as "The Real Ghostbusters"—make it impossible not to recall Bill Murray and Slimer.
- ❖ "Tall Tales" sees the Trickster conjure up a creature very reminiscent of Leatherface from *THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE*.



## NO LOVE FOR TWILIGHT

- ❖ The episode "Live Free or Twi Hard" begins with two characters meeting in a bar named the Black Rose. Their names are Robert and Kristen. A large part of the dialogue between the two of them is word-for-word the same as the dialogue in *TWILIGHT*, and the actors are obviously doing their best impressions of Pattinson and Stewart.
- ❖ In "Free to Be You and Me", while Dean is killing a vampire, he says "Eat it, Twilight!"
- ❖ Dean: "Oh god, I'm Pattinson."



## EPISODE TITLES

- ❖ "Lucifer Rising", the final episode of Season Four, is named after the short film of the same name from 1972.
- ❖ The episode title "Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things" is borrowed from the 1972 (Drive-In!) movie with the same name.
- ❖ In fact, all the episode titles are a reference to something, be it classic rock albums ("Dark Side of the Moon"), cartoons ("It's the Great Pumpkin, Sam Winchester"), or cult horror flicks ("Motel Hell").

## CAMEOS AND PREVIOUS ROLES

- "My Bloody Valentine" refers to the classic cult horror movie from 1981, the band, and also to the remake MY BLOODY VALENTINE 3D (2009)... which starred Jensen Ackles.
- The episode "Fallen Idols" guest starred Paris Hilton, with whom Jared Padalecki made the movie HOUSE OF WAX in 2005. At one point in the episode, Dean quips, "I've never even seen HOUSE OF WAX."
- When Sam approaches the stairs in the movie theater in "Monster Movie", there is a poster for the 1953 HOUSE OF WAX, starring Vincent Price, in the foreground. As already mentioned, Jared Padalecki starred in the remake.



## AND MORE TRIBUTES GALORE...

- The follow exchange takes place in "Free to Be You and Me": "And let me guess, he vanished into thin air?" asks Dean. The deputy says, "No, Kolchak." Kolchak was a fictional reporter who specialized in investigating paranormal events and was featured in movies and a 70s TV series called THE NIGHT STALKER.
- "The Magnificent Seven" has Dean referring quite obviously to SEVEN when he yells, "What's in the box?!" Of course, he then has to explain the reference when nobody appears to get it. Later, Pride gives a shout-out to THE SHINING when he calls, "Heeere's Johnny!"
- Director and writer George Romero (NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD) is given a shout-out in the fictional vampire series referenced in the episode "Live Free or Twi Hard", as the star of the series is named "Romcro".
- There's a twofold reference in "Death Takes a Holiday": the ghost child, whose name is Cole, says, "Thanks, Haley Joel. I know I'm dead." Haley Joel Osment played Cole Sear, the kid who sees dead people, in M. Night Shyamalan's THE SIXTH SENSE.
- Dr. Silvia Perlman meets her death at the hands of the hellhounds in "Crossroad Blues" while staying at the "Baskerville Motel" (thank you, HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES).
- "Hammer of the Gods" has Dean referring to Hitchcock's classic PSYCHO when he says, "And you keep an eye on Norman Bates, here."
- Dean's dialogue references could fill an entire article on their own—"You are so Amityville!" (referring to THE AMITYVILLE HORROR), "Well then, *quid pro quo* Clarice" (referring to SILENCE OF THE LAMBS), and "Look here, Nurse Ratched, I've seen Cuckoo's Nest, so don't try any of that soul-destroying authoritarian crap on me" (referring to ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST), among them.
- In "It's a Terrible Life", the death of the security guard when he falls into the elevator and is decapitated in front of Sam is reminiscent of the fatality that kicks off the very first RESIDENT EVIL game.
- Tessa the Reaper, created by Lindsay McKeon and featured first in "In My Time of Dying", was modeled on the character of Death from Neil Gaiman's SANDMAN graphic novel series.
- I am particularly fond of the Plants vs. Zombies shout-out in the episode "Mannequin 3". Plants vs. Zombies is a popular video game from Top Cap, and Sam references it by saying, "Well, that's ridiculous. Plants could never kill a zombie."



I could go on, but a complete list of references would require a book. I'll leave you with this: In the episode "Bad Day at Black Rock", the thief and dealer in stolen objects of paranormal artifacts, Bela Talbot, first gives the pseudonym "Lugosi"—making her full name, of course, "Bela Lugosi". ☺

# 10 ICONIC MONSTERS OF SUPERNATURAL

BY L.R. DUNBAR

from vampires and werewolves to Native American and Hindu creatures, but became driven by a Judeo-Christian myth arc as time went on. While some monsters appear in just one episode, many are featured in multiple seasons with mythologies that become increasingly complex. As the story of Sam and Dean unfolds, it is revealed that Sam himself has a little monster in him, and the creatures the Winchesters encounter have provided insight into the brothers' very human story.

SO LET'S LOOK AT THE TEN MOST ICONIC MONSTERS OF SUPERNATURAL, BEGINNING WITH ONE OF THE EARLIEST--

## 10. WENDIGO

Appearing in only the second episode but mentioned a number of times in the series, the wendigo takes a place on this list for its sheer gross, creepy horror factor. Like a number of creatures on the show, wendigos are humans transformed into monsters through their own decisions and actions. Based loosely on a spirit from Native American lore; having resorted to cannibalism, a wendigo will develop an insatiable appetite for human flesh. It is a fast, silent hunter that snatches campers and hikers from cabins and tents to hang in its lair and serve as future meals, much like a spider wraps its prey in a web. The wendigo is a huge, lanky, man-like creature with grayish skin and long, clawed fingers. It can only be killed with fire.



## 9. DJINN

Based on Arab myths, Djinn are distinguished by tattoos which grow, vine-like, down their arms, when they use their powers. Their skin may also glow blue. Djinn poison their victims through touch and feed on their blood while the individual is in a dreamlike trance. While the djinn in "What Is and What Should Never Be" put its victims into a wish-fulfillment dream, the djinn in "Pac-Man Fever" gave its victims drug-induced nightmares and turned their insides to jelly before feeding. Djinn can also kill quickly with large amounts of the poison. In some cases, the poison can be counteracted with an antidote, and victims can fight the effects of the poison to snap themselves out of the trance. A silver knife dipped in lamb's blood is the only weapon known to be lethal to djinn.



## 8. SHIFTER/DOLPHINERS

Nasty creatures introduced in Season One's "Skin", the malevolence of this monster was brilliantly revealed when it transformed into a perfect copy of Dean Winchester, implicating him in a series of murders and leading to the brothers' subsequent run-ins with the law. In "Monster Movie", the killer proved not to be a vampire, werewolf, or mummy; but a lonely shifter masquerading as monsters from classic Hollywood movies. When taking on a new form, shifters generally shed their skin, hair, and teeth, leaving behind disgusting piles of flesh. They are genetically mutated humans that have access to the memories of the person they mimic, apparently through their genetic code. They can also take on the appearance of a dead person just from seeing the person's image, and can impregnate human women. Shifters can be decapitated; or killed with a silver bullet, knife in the heart, or with iridium.



## 6. GHOSTS AND VENGEFUL SPIRITS

The series pilot took on the legend of the Woman in White, a vengeful spirit that punished unfaithful men; and vengeful spirits have appeared in every season since. Season Seven used the death of the Winchesters' surrogate father figure, Bobby Singer, to provide deeper insight into the nature, existence, and motives of ghosts and spirits. After refusing to pass over to the next plane with his reaper in order to watch over Sam and Dean in ghost form, Bobby slowly became a vengeful spirit himself. After nearly killing Sam with his uncontrollable rage, Bobby relented and made the decision to pass on. It's through his story that the boys learned that any spirit who stays on the plane of the living will eventually slip into a state of decay and madness. The most common way to vanquish a ghost is to salt and burn their remains. Ghosts can sometimes possess people and are often attached to physical objects. Bobby, for example, was attached to his flask, and it had to be destroyed with fire to release his spirit and allow him to pass on.



## 7. REAPERS

When first introduced in "Faith", reapers were silent, inescapable, and creepy as hell. Tall with grey, corpse-like flesh; withered, expressionless faces; and dark suits, they are almost frightening enough to simply scare their victims to death. The reaper in "In My Time of Dying", however, showed that reapers can appear human in order to convince their expiring charges to pass from the plane of the living to that of the dead. This reaper later revealed her true form to be an incorporeal crone trying to claim a mortally injured Dean's soul. Seasons Eight and Nine introduced rogue reapers who defy Death's command and act as freelancers and mercenaries, selling their unique services to other supernatural creatures for motives that are as yet unclear. Reapers can move between planes of existence, stop time, alter human perception, possess human vessels, teleport, and use telekinesis. Initially thought only to succumb to Death's scythe, later seasons reveal that they can also be killed by an angel blade.



## S. VAMPIRES

Vampires have a long and complex history on SUPERNATURAL. When the series began, they had been nearly hunted to extinction. However, Season Five introduced the Alpha Vampire, who later encouraged his "children" to feed from blood banks and actively increase their numbers when they were being hunted by the demon Crowley and angel Castiel in Season Six. Perhaps the most human of all monsters, they live in groups called nests, mate for life, and have the ability—if they choose—to survive on human blood from blood banks or animal blood. Although it burns, sunlight does not kill them, nor do they need an invitation to enter a home. The most common method of killing a vampire is decapitation, but they can be killed with the special pistol made by Samuel Colt or with angelic powers. Freshly bitten and "turned" persons can be cured of their vampirism if they have not yet fed on human blood.

## 4. EVE, 'THE MOTHER OF ALL'

Sprung from purgatory by dragons in human form during Season Six, Eve was the creator of all supernatural beings. She arrived topside and began creating hybrid monsters in response to Crowley and Castiel hunting her alpha creations. The show implies that she and the related leviathan are ancients created before angels and man, and her powers included turning humans into monsters with a touch, levitation, shapeshifting, and teleportation. One of her creepier creations was the Khan worm, named in homage to Star Trek's Ceti eels, which looks like a cross between a slug and centipede. This parasitic creature enters the host's body through the ear, leaves a black goopy substance when it exits, accesses their memories, and controls their actions. Its invasion increases the host's strength. It also reanimates corpses, but can be killed with electricity. Eve herself could only be killed with the ash of a Phoenix, which Dean tricked her into ingesting through his own blood.

## 3. LEVIATHAN


Season Seven's leviathan are noteworthy for being another one of God's first creations, and as such are incredibly powerful. Accidentally released from purgatory by the angel Castiel, the leviathan, like so many monsters on SUPERNATURAL, can take on human likeness. Leviathan also feed on humans by unhinging their human form's head and splitting it in half at the jaw to reveal enormous mouths filled with great teeth and bifurcated tongues. The most Lovecraftian of the SUPERNATURAL monsters, leviathan are clever and well organized. Rather than attacking by force, they conspired to taint the human food supply in order to turn people into placid

"cattle". Their leader was a charismatic business leader named Dick Roman, who punished his subordinates' failures by forcing them to devour themselves. Individual leviathan can be harmed with borax and killed by cutting off the head and keeping it separate from the body. The Winchesters derailed the leviathan's grand scheme when Dean stabbed Roman with the bone of a righteous mortal dipped in the blood of a fallen angel, a demon, and an alpha monster. Left without leadership, the remaining leviathan scattered, and appeared to vanish from the Earth without a trace.





## 2. ANGELS



If you think it odd to include angels in a list of monsters, you really don't know SUPERNATURAL. Dubbed by Dean as "d--ks with wings", angels have no love of humans, and were as determined as their fallen brother Lucifer to bring about the Apocalypse in Season Five. A sly, silver-tongued manipulator, Lucifer sought to use Sam as a vessel against his brother—the archangel Michael—and destroy humanity, but they were thwarted by Sam. Once again locked in a cage in hell, Lucifer shredded Sam's soul in retribution. Petty, chaotic, and power-mad warriors for whom free will is an uncomfortable and alien concept, the angels continued to threaten humanity by bringing their civil war to earth in the Ninth Season. Angels' true form remains a mystery,

but it has been depicted as a light so bright it burns out human eyes accompanied by loud, destructive sounds that most humans cannot comprehend. Castiel has described himself as a "multi-dimensional wavelength of celestial intent" the size of the Chrysler Building. Shadows and burnt outlines after their death indicate that angels have wings that aren't visible to humans. While angels must have permission from a human host in order to possess them as a vessel, they aren't above lying, manipulation, coercion, or torture to get that permission. Angels are powered by grace in much the same way that humans are powered by their souls. Angels can be trapped within a ring of burning holy oil or killed with special swords.

## 1. DEMONS

Unlike angels, who are a race apart from humans, demons are human souls whose humanity was burnt away by the tortures of hell. Ordinary demons can often be identified by their black eyes. Specialized and more powerful demons have eyes of red, white, or yellow. Unlike angels, demons don't need permission to possess a human, and can be driven from their human vessel by exorcism or killing the host. A demon's incorporeal form is usually shown as a cloud of thick, sooty smoke. The first Big Bad of the series, the demon Azazel, killed Sam and Dean's mother Mary Winchester in Sam's nursery, after tainting Sam with demon blood to prepare him to be Lucifer's vessel. Those demonic actions set into motion the hunting life that created and defined the adult Winchester brothers. Believing they would be rewarded for their loyalty, demons worked to release Lucifer from his cage in hell in order to bring about the Apocalypse, which was averted by the Winchesters in Season Five. In Season Six, former crossroads demon Crowley took the helm in hell and colluded with Castiel to release souls from purgatory in a ploy to increase their respective powers in hell and heaven. Season Eight revealed a new type of demon, Abbadon, one of the Knights of Hell, created by Lucifer from the among the first fallen humans. She challenges Crowley for the throne. Demons can be trapped within a magical symbol called a Devil's trap, tortured with holy water and salt, and bound with iron. They can be killed with special knives, angel swords, Death's scythe, and a pistol made by Samuel Colt. Angels can kill demons, as could the special powers Sam Winchester got from the demon blood he'd been tainted with as an infant and consumed during his addiction as an adult.

With the angel war brought to Earth and the King of Hell battling a Knight of Hell in Season Nine, the over-arching story remains focused on Judeo-Christian monsters. No doubt, the Winchesters will have any number of Monster of the Week opponents to contend with along the way as well. In Season Nine, they've encountered vengeful spirits, rogue reapers, a shaman, and the Wicked Witch of the West. No myth or legend is too obscure or too outlandish to wreak havoc on SUPERNATURAL; and no matter how powerful, frightening, or unbelievable the monster, Sam and Dean Winchester will burn it down. ☉



# HELLRAISER

MIKE MIGNOLA ON 20 YEARS OF HELLBOY

BY HOLLY INTERLANDI

**H**ellboy: pop culture icon. Detective. Drunkard. Giant red humanoid with horn-stumps and a forked tail. Subject of two inspired films written and directed by Guillermo del Toro. And brainchild of the mighty Mike Mignola, who was gracious enough to do some reminiscing with us now that his original character has forged on since the first miniseries debuted in 1994.

**Famous Monsters.** First of all, congratulations on Hellboy's success. 20 years is a staggering figure. How do you feel like the landscape of comics has changed since Hellboy first exploded onto the scene in "Seed of Destruction", and

how has the existence of Hellboy helped to affect that landscape?

**Mike Mignola.** The beauty of Hellboy is that almost since the moment I started, I've been able to avoid focusing on the landscape. My impression is that back in the day, when we first did Hellboy, a lot of people were coming out of the mainstream and doing odder, more independent stuff.

I was part of a group of guys that were all doing that—Frank Miller, John Byrne, and so on. But then a lot of those guys ended up stumbling back into mainstream comics, or leaving comics entirely. Now from what I understand, there's a lot of creator-owned stuff going on again. Everything I hear

about Image tells me that it's big on new creator-owned books. But we still sort of live in the shadow of Marvel and DC. I'd like to think that I made it look like doing creator-owned work is a viable option. Certainly there aren't many of us who have been able to do it for twenty years, but I like to think that I'm out there as an example that it's possible.

**FM.** The "paranormal investigator" is such a regular thing in comics now. Is that part of why you've altered the Hellboy status quo so drastically, so you don't become stagnant?

**MM.** Nothing I've done in the comic is a reaction to anything that anybody else is doing. I see a lot of what people are working on, and I get to the comic shop occasionally, but as soon as I realized I was able to get away with Hellboy, I was able to focus almost entirely on that little world I was creating. If Hellboy's veered off from where it started, it's because I've done those stories already. I've done him as an occult detective; I've done the team of occult detectives. I don't like to keep trading over the same ground.

**FM.** If you had to point to some cultural DNA of Hellboy, be it comics or whatever else, what would you point to?

**MM.** I grew up reading comics through my high school years, so there's a certain amount of comic book DNA in there, but consciously I was thinking of



old pulp magazine heroes. Manly Wade Wellman wrote a series about a guy called Silver John who just wandered around the Appalachian Mountains and ran into trouble. It was all very folklore-based and authentic. Some of the Robert E. Howard stuff, too—not Conan, but his other characters, like Solomon Kane. The idea of a character who just wanders around and stumbles into things. The stand-alone short story was very much in my head when I started; it was always the plan that if I could get this up and running, that's what I would do.

**FM.** And I assume that's part of why you've always published **HELLBOY** as miniseries instead of an ongoing?

**MM.** Yeah. It's a strange beast, because it is miniseries—I still think that some of the best stories I did are the shortest—and in that format, we were lumped into something that a lot of people were doing. But because of various anthologies, I was able to do even shorter stories, and it all made for an interesting creature. You've got all these short stories, and if you put them together, there are certain things that run through them. Especially later on, when I started doing the really big stories that wrap up towards the death of Hellboy, I was drawing on all these things that were in the early shorts. But while doing those stories, I never knew if there was a character or incident in the story that would come back to bite me in the ass somewhere down the road. Like this character, this little pig-guy, who's a nothing and shows up, gets defeated, and runs away and lives under a bush—is that character ever going to come back? I'd do the little stories and not really know what they were adding up to until much later. That's very much what I was talking about with the pulp magazine thing. I mean, when Robert E. Howard wrote Conan, he wrote the stories completely out of order. There was no "Story #1, he's born; Story #2, he's



ten years old..." It was like Story #1, he's twenty. Story #2, he's an old king. Story #3, he's thirty-two. It was such a random mix of things—he left it up to other people to string it all together into some kind of chronological order. It's been fun to be able to bounce back and forth and write this character at various points and only years later attempt to structure it so it makes some kind of coherent sense.

**FM.** There's always some untold story somewhere in between the pages. In that sense, it's helpful to have told things out of order. It's the same story, but you can almost tell more of them.

**MM.** Well, the very first Hellboy miniseries started with his birth in 1944. Then we skipped to 1994. He's been around all those years, so I built in a gigantic window at the beginning that I could then spend the rest of my career dropping stories into.

**FM.** As you said, certain themes keep



#### **Hellboy, falling into Hell and finally living up to his name.**

coming up. That very first mini had frogs in it, and then of course there was **BPRD: PLAGUE OF FROGS**... what gives with frogs, anyway? Are you terrified of frogs?

**MM.** Frogs and monkeys. [laughs] I actually couldn't give a s— about either one, but there are stories about plagues of frogs and rains of frogs. Lovecraft would occasionally say things like "the chirping of the frogs!" as if it were this horrific thing. I think it's because they're so innocuous-looking and harmless. I just thought, well, I'll use those guys. And again, they became a major thing in **BPRD** because I stepped in to write the third arc and thought, I like those frog guys. I got rid of them, but what the hell? I'll bring them back. Again, it's not something I realized going into it, that it was going to snowball into a gigantic arc. But that's the beauty of doing this and not really knowing where it's going to go.

**FM.** You look back and it all makes sense, but while you're doing it it feels like you're flying by the seat of your pants.

**MM.** Yeah! I mean, every time with Scott Allie or John Arcudi—especially with John, when we're plotting various **BPRD** things—we'll come up with stuff and laugh and say, "Now that's going to look like we planned it from the beginning!"

Well, obviously it wasn't. The trick has always been to write this stuff loosely and

vaguely enough—especially when you start throwing out prophecies—that there's room to develop the stuff. You don't want to write yourself into a corner. You have to keep it very fluid. So even though we've plotted HELLI BOY and BPRD out to what's kind of the end of that particular universe, it's done in broad strokes so there's plenty of room to say, well, someone's going to do this, but we don't yet know who. There are various pieces on the board, but we're not sure which piece is going to get all the way to the other side of the board and kill the king. Going into that last arc of Hellboy stories when he was killed off, there were so many pieces on the board, I wasn't really sure who was going to serve what particular function. That's the beauty of leaving it open enough as you're plotting: the characters have room to breathe and go where they want. You steer them, but certain characters are going to do particular things that you didn't quite anticipate.

**FM.** And I'm sure it helps to have a team of people to talk to, rather than just talking to yourself in your own head. Hellboy is an extreme example of world-building, after all—there are spinoffs, and spinoffs of spinoffs, and you've got a team of writers and artists for each one. Over the years, how have you picked the characters and creative teams for those spinoffs?

**MM.** Well, I think the reason things are working as well as they are is that the team, at least for writing, has been very small. You've got me and John Arcudi; Joshua Dysart, who came in briefly; and then Scott

Allie, who began as the editor. So between the three and a half of us, it's been very easy to maintain one particular direction. If you look at bigger companies, the trouble is that you start throwing characters out and you have a dozen different guys writing them. So what happens is that this guy doesn't like what that guy did, so he's got to write that off as a dream; and this guy doesn't like that, so he's got to ignore this; and that's when you start to get reboots and origin stories that have been done a dozen times, and I never wanted that situation. I mean, I certainly never thought anything would get that big, but 20 years down the road, I don't have to say well, let's just start all over! Or, let's bring in another writer who's going to completely annihilate everything we've done! This has always been meant to be finite. It's meant to be a story that has an end. That's the beauty of being the boss.

And as far as artists go, I've just gone after artists I really like. There's no magic to that. HELLBOY is tricky, because when Duncan [Fegredo] took over, I needed an artist who had *some* of what I do. Nobody else had ever drawn Hellboy, and I didn't want it to be too jarring. BPRD was always a lot easier, because there was no particular look to BPRD. Whatever great artist we could get to play in that sandbox was great. I've kept a much smaller gang on HELLBOY.

**FM.** Well, the look of Hellboy is very distinctive.

**MM.** It's always going to be a problem when you have a character so much based on an artist's style. And Hellboy is so much a product of my drawing style that quite frankly,

a lot of guys just can't pull it off. Richard Corben, whom I was just in awe of forever, was probably the one guy where I went outside of my stylistic thing and went, okay. Richard and I are completely different creatures when it comes to the way we draw, but he's Richard Corben. We'll make allowances there. [laughs]

**FM.** As far as your particular writers go—John Arcudi and Scott Allie, whom you're working with now—what do each of them bring to the universe that you might not be able to?

**MM.** They're both very character-driven guys. I tend to think in big operatic moves: "And then lightning bolts rained down from heaven and transformed the landscape!" That's the level on which I usually think. So my job is to throw the lightning bolts, and John and Scott, their job is to say, well, from the perspective of the people on the ground, who actually have lives and relationships and personalities, this is how those lightning bolts are going to affect them. I always knew the Hellboy character and understood him, but when I created all the other characters, I didn't really get into who they were. My focus was so much on Hellboy and the supernatural mythology I was building up that all those other characters—I just didn't have the energy or the interest to focus on them. So handing those characters over to John and letting him flesh them out, and then handing Abe [Sapien] over to Scott... Scott's a little bit closer to me when it comes to our interest in the supernatural. John, who's written a lot of wonderful horror stuff, is a bit more nuts-and-bolts, people-oriented. But I think those combinations working together is



**Mignola insists that Hellboy's personality is a mirror of his own. Hence the skeleton.**





why that stuff works. Certainly, if you care about the personalities on the BPRD, it's almost entirely due to John. He made them into people. It's very strange when I call up John occasionally and say, "Would Liz do this? Would Liz say this?"

**FM.** You've spoken so much about mythologies that weave their way through the Hellboy universe, whether they're original myths or references to the plagues of the Bible and the Cthulhu myths. Is there a particular cultural myth you haven't explored that you'd like to? Is that part of why Hellboy is in Hell right now? [laughs]

**MM.** Yeah, that was one of the gags with *HELLBOY IN HELL*. There are certain mythologies I just can't wrap my brain around. The Asian stuff. In India, the mythology is extremely complicated. So I've steered away from that because it was kind of overwhelming. What I'm usually looking for with a culture is—there's a monster; I can wrap my brain around that monster; I will have Hellboy go to that country and fight that monster, without getting into the various cultural and religious things that might relate to that creature. Asia is just very hard for me. Plus, I don't know how to draw Asia. I don't know how those houses work. I don't know what a particular temple would

look like. But if I throw Hellboy into Hell, I can wander him into a corner of Hell that's sort of Asian-feeling. Take that Asian stuff that I like and filter it through my filter, and it doesn't have to jive with real-world Asia, because I've located it in Hell. And it wouldn't necessarily be whatever underworld there is in Asian mythology. It would just be a place that's *kind of like* Asia, populated by the monsters that I love from Asian folklore. A lot of *HELLBOY IN HELL* is to free me up from having to draw the real world so I can filter everything through what I really want to draw as opposed to what's really there.

**FM.** The current BPRD: *HELL ON EARTH* storyline has all the trappings of a Lovecraftian apocalypse—you've got the hammerheads bursting out of the ground, purple tentacled things... should readers be worried about where this is going?

**MM.** I gotta say, if I had to choose, I would live in the Hellboy universe version of Hell rather than on the earth. If I could get a bus off of the planet... Hell is a much nicer place. It's very quiet and peaceful for the most part. It's much calmer than the way the earth is. People should be very concerned about where Earth is going. I've said from the very beginning that I wanted to do a book where we could wreck

and then accelerate to the point where you go, oh my god, is this going to be a planet of the apes? It's a wonderfully huge arc. We just go along and start wrecking stuff and then... keep wrecking stuff.

**FM.** There's no ret-conning in the Hellboy universe. [laughs]

**MM.** You have monsters that show up and just don't go away! I always loved that idea, that these monsters would show up and just sit there. And gas would spill out of them, which would cause other s--- to go on, or they'd lay eggs, or whatever it is... like in *Lovecraft*, the idea of Cthulhu showing up one day and just sitting there. That's a whole different kind of horror. I like that. My broadstroke idea is to turn the world into that. And then John and Scott, their job is to have guys scurry around on the ground in between the gigantic, monolithic things.

**FM.** I love that you keep mentioning Lovecraft, because he really was so obsessed with those lightning bolts and huge monsters and not so much the individual characters. I'm not sure—even with all the myths that he created—I'm not sure it would be possible to do the kind of thing that the Hellboy universe has done with Lovecraft because he was so obsessed with the bigger picture.

**MM.** And that's it—I know nobody would still be reading these books if only I was

stuff and we wouldn't get a mandate from the publisher that said oh, you've gotta rebuild New York City now. If we're gonna wreck it, it's going to stay wrecked. What'll be interesting is to see what *rises* from the wreckage, or what that wreckage descends down into. I think John and I both recognize that we've gotten to a very odd place, where the dominoes are falling really fast. The snowball is going downhill, and we're just like, wow, we really have turned these corners where there's no going back. I've seen a lot of books that are set in a post-apocalyptic world, but to do a book that goes on functioning in the real world for years and years

writing them. I mean, they wouldn't exist, because I'm too slow, but... you need to have characters that people care about. Not that I don't care about the characters; I just couldn't invest that much energy into *that many* characters. John is a better writer about people. Then you look at what Scott's doing in *ABE SAPIEN*... it seems like 90% of the characters there are regular human beings that Abe runs into. I know how to write Abe Sapien—he's evolving into something; he's a creature with weird origins ... I can write that guy, but I don't know how many teenagers in the desert I could write. Not that I don't like human beings; I just don't know that I could write a book that's so centered on them. And I sure as hell couldn't do any of the military stuff. That's something I have absolutely no interest in. John and I are working on something right now, and I'm doing most of the writing, but if it's anything that involves how the real world works... I'll tell the artist, "In this panel, somebody asks somebody else why this happens, and in this panel, a guy explains it." At which point John will have to come in and write the big explanation. If it's about the universe, cosmic things, the god of this, an alligator man—I can write that, but if it's about the BPRD getting clearance to fly from here to there, John has to fill it in. [laughs]

**FM.** *ABE SAPIEN* in particular seems to be more concerned with philosophy and existentialism and "What is my place in this world?" than it is with outright horror. Is there a particular reason for that?

**MM.** I wanted Scott to write the book he wanted to write. As Editor, he's been putting up with me for a gazillion years—I don't want to torture him when it comes to writing. He loves Abe Sapien, and I said, why don't you write this book the way you want to write it? The main difference between *ABE SAPIEN* and *BPRD* is that *BPRD* is teams of guys running around. The Abe Sapien book should be lonely. The focus should be on one guy who isn't flying helicopters; he's hitchhiking across the face of the world. It's about this character and what he's going through, but it's also a different perspective on seeing the world. In my brain, that's the major difference between the two books. The *BPRD* is always looking at stuff on monitors, flying over stuff, or trooping through it together with guns. Abe is one guy trying to find

his place. And considering the extent of the changes we're making on the planet, I thought it'd be great to have two entirely different books to sell to the reader. Like, oh yeah, you are *really* messing up the planet. Dead horse bodies are sprouting weird eggs. The BPRD might fly over that, but Abe's gotta walk past it.

**FM.** I guess you sort of already answered this, but for people who might be reading this and aren't really familiar with *HELLBOY*, how important would you say continuity is to the Hellboy universe? Do people need to pick up the first trade paperback, or would you encourage them to pick up something random?

**MM.** When I travel, I travel with one of the Hellboy collections of short stories. If I run into somebody and they're curious and want to try Hellboy, I give them short stories, because in those collections you get a nice little variety. Maybe a little grim dark story, a nice goofy one—you really see the range. And if they like that, then I say well, unfortunately the books are all numbered, so go and pick up number one. I don't usually tell people to start with book one. Not because John Byrne scripted it—I think it's good, but it's not as strong as some of the later stuff. But it is where everything starts. If you want to begin there, that's fine; but as a sampler, I usually hand someone the short stories. And to understand the whole world, you can read just the *HELLBOY* books, not *BPRD*, and still get it. At no point did I want to do books where somebody *had* to pick up a book they didn't want to pick up. *BPRD* is the closest we have to an ongoing monthly book, so if you want to read just *BPRD*, that's fine. At no point do you have to read *HELLBOY*. You don't have to read *LOBSTER JOHNSON*. You don't have to read the Edward Grey *WITCHFINDER* series. But kinda like early Marvel comics—the more books you read, the better idea you'll get of this world. You don't need to read them all for plot, but you'll see the bigger picture. You see that certain things are introduced and story over and referenced. But as far as the "Story continues in this other book!"—I never wanted to play that trick.

**FM.** What about the films as introductions to the world? Did del Toro go places with them that you wouldn't have, or do you think they're a good representation of what

you do with Hellboy?

**MM.** They're fine as an introduction to the idea of Hellboy. If you saw the first movie and then picked up the comic, you might be thrown that some of the relationships are completely different. The love interest that exists in the film doesn't exist in the comic. You can't replace reading the trade paperbacks by seeing the movie, but if you liked the movie, it would be interesting to look at the comics and go, oh yeah, it's kinda sorta pretty much the same story. It hits the major landmarks. And it's true to the spirit of the comic. So far I've only had one person say, "I love the movie; I went out and bought the comic, but I didn't like the comic." I'm sure there are other people who think that, but I've only had one person actually wait in line to tell me. [laughs]

**FM.** I know you've said there'd be no third Hellboy movie. Does that even interest you? Would you want it to go anywhere?

**MM.** Do I want to see a third movie that picks up where the second one left off? I gotta say that no part of me is dying to see that movie, because it would be so totally removed from the world I created. The whole "Liz is pregnant with twins" thing... it's one thing to say, here are two characters who didn't have a romantic relationship, and now they're boyfriend/girlfriend. That's fine. But if you accelerate it to the point that Hellboy's going to have kids running around... I'd be curious to see what he would do, I guess.

The tricky thing with the movies is that more people are always going to know that version of your thing. So you live in the shadow of it. Even in working with people who are familiar with the comics, they will confuse things about the comics with the movies. Like, "You're drawing Hellboy in his room—it'll be full of cats!" Nope, that's the movie. "His gun is called Samaritan!" Nope, that's the movie. Looking at artwork for various things, especially licensed things, is constantly having to say, change that; it's the movie. Change that; it's the movie. It's just out there in the public so much more than the comic. It's great for book sales, but it is something that you have to be aware of. If I'm on an airplane sitting next to somebody and I tell them what I do, there might be a 50/50 chance that they've heard of Hellboy, but almost certainly it's been because of the movies. Most people have no idea that there is a comic. Maybe they've got an idea it's a



comic on some vague level, but they think it's a Marvel or DC comic.

I mean, the Hellboy movies were not colossal successes. They did fine, but even in that case, you see how much you live in the shadow of the movie. I remember saying to del Toro one day—we were on set, and I said, “I realize you win. Because if I get hit by a bus and it's an extremely slow news day, and somebody

reports that the guy who created Hellboy got run over by a bus, if they show video or a still picture, they'll show something from the movie. They are *not* going to show anything I drew.” It's kind of a weird moment when you realize that is the public perception of the thing you created. You see it all the time with the Marvel comic stuff. Any references to Stan Lee or Jack Kirby, they'll show something from a Marvel movie.

**FM.** With the Marvel cinematic universe, that's absolutely true. I've often complained that people who go see the movies never read the comics. I guess it's just the way it is.

**MM.** And as you get older, for me, the Marvel comics I grew up on—well, that's how many years ago? Thirty years ago, forty years ago. That's my version of Marvel. These people were not even *born* then. People going to these movies didn't grow up with that. It's very strange when people come up to me and say, “I grew up reading HELLBOY.” In my mind, Hellboy is that *new* thing. Granted, I've been doing Hellboy twice as long as I did work before Hellboy, but I still look at my career as the Marvel/DC career, and then the Hellboy career. The Hellboy career is 20 years old now. So when a guy says he grew up reading this stuff, I think he's exaggerating; then I look at him and go, oh—you're 25 years old. You were five years old when the first issue came

out. For you, it's just something that's always been there.

**FM.** Where do you see HELLBOY going from here? I know you said there's a finite end to the universe. Do you have any kind of timeline? Is he still going to be around in another 20 years?

**MM.** It's hard to say if there's a timeline. There is stuff that we have planned that's

the time of that first miniseries, “Seed of Destruction”. There's a lot of room there—both as he continues forward in his afterlife experience, and also as Hellboy “classics”. We did BPRD 1946, 1947, and 1948, and there's an upcoming BPRD series—at least part of it—that takes place in 1949. So in the BPRD, we're starting to see Hellboy grow up.

And there's something very appealing about those old stories when Hellboy is just a guy, or thinks he's just a guy. There's not a gigantic burden of “You're the beast of the apocalypse, blah blah blah.” It's fun, and sometimes confusing, to do simple Hellboy and also apocalyptic-gigantic-prophecy Hellboy. I just wrote a story that takes place in the drunken five months he spent in Mexico, which is a great period to write stories about because he's drunk the whole time. That's a really fun Hellboy to write, and I've got a few more of those planned. I can't see a time when I run out of Hellboy stories.

**FM.** That's awesome. That means it's definitely become a mythological thing. And this year is the twentieth anniversary of Hellboy. Comic shops around the country are going to be having “Hellboy Day” on March 22nd. In keeping with the spirit of the character you created, how would Hellboy celebrate Hellboy Day?

**MM.** I think... he wouldn't celebrate it. He'd celebrate it about the same way I celebrate birthdays. You just kinda go, oh, I'm older? All right. That's fine. Hellboy is very much me, personality-wise. He might roll his eyes

a little bit and he might get a little contemplative as he's drinking whatever he's drinking and go, “Holy s---, I lived a lot longer than I thought I was going to.” And that's about the extent of it. I don't see him putting on a party hat. ☹



kind of tricky, and it's hard to even say how it's going to play out. Ideally, I would love for there to be Hellboy comics 20 years from now. How exactly that will work, I can't tell you. But there's certainly no end to new Hellboy stories. There's that gigantic period of his career between the time he was born and

AN INTERVIEW WITH

# THE CROW

CREATOR JAMES O'BARR



BY HOLLY INTERLANDI

**T**wenty years ago, a film came out based on a black and white comic book called **THE CROW**. The film received a lot of attention, mostly due to its star, Brandon Lee, being fatally shot while filming. But all these years later, the movie is still cherished—mainly because the source material, a comic book by Detroit native James O'Barr first released in 1989, is a story of such personal and stylistic magnitude that it remains impossible to forget. A new adaptation is being filmed as this story goes to print, and O'Barr is tied to the project as the creative consultant—which, along with his new **CROW** comics for IDW Publishing, are his first official affiliations with the property in years.

**Famous Monsters.** Twenty years after it opened, do you have any thoughts on the original film adaptation of **THE CROW**?  
**James O'Barr.** I was really happy with the original overall considering it was a little ten million dollar film that nobody expected to do anything. But between Brandon [Lee] and [director] Alex Proyas—they took my story and created a new genre of film. It's not necessarily a superhero film, but it's a film based on a comic that takes itself very seriously. It's also got to be one of the most stolen-from movies ever.

**FM.** Does that put pressure on the remake?  
**JO.** See, everyone is saying "remake" and "reboot", and it's not. It's not that at all.

**FM.** It's going back to the original source material, right?

**JO.** It's going back to the book. We're going to do a literal adaptation of the book, with a proper budget and everything that made the story special that they didn't have the money for in Brandon's film, like the visual metaphors of trains and horses.

**FM.** How did your position as creative consultant on the new film come about?

**JO.** Essentially, they have made every misstep you can make in the past few years with this film. Hiring bad directors, announcing stars like Mark Wahlberg and Jason Statham and Bradley Cooper... obviously, they didn't get it. But then the director, Javier Gutiérrez, flew over from Spain to meet me and talk to me about it. And I literally spent the first hour trying to talk him out of it. Saying, you don't want

to do this. Every director and actor that has starred in one of the **CROW** sequels has never worked in America again. They've all disappeared into obscurity. But he said, "I don't want to remake the first film. I want to make your book. Exactly how it is." And then I watched his film—he shot one in Spain, **BEFORE THE FALL**. And within fifteen minutes of watching it, if he didn't already have the job, I would have hired him. We think the same way about scene setups and foreground elements... even focus shifts. We're very much on the same page with everything. We're going to make a really good team. And my name isn't for sale. If they only wanted to use my name as a safety net or a hood ornament to please the fans—I'd tear the check up in front of them. But if they actually want my input on how to make this a good film that will last and make everybody some money... a worthwhile film that transcends genres... I'm all in.

**FM.** The buzz for the new film in the industry is already huge.

**JO.** They have so much money already put into this project with all their previous missteps that they almost *have* to make it to make back some of their money. And bringing me on board is the smartest

thing they could have done, I think. I have the integrity to bring fans back to it. I mean, after they've done everything you could possibly do to alienate CROW fans... [laughs]

FM. Well, obviously you know how to make something stick around. Because here we are, 25 years after the book was first published.

JO. It's still in print, it's in 14 different languages, and it still sells well. So I guess I did something right.

FM. To me, THE CROW is one of the seminal black and white independent comic works that set the bar for others.

JO. It's almost become this rite of passage. When you're sixteen, you read THE CROW and buy two albums by The Cure. I thought all my fans would grow old with me and that would be the end of it, but it keeps getting handed down to the next generation of kids. I'm like, you weren't even *born* when this book came out. How do you know about it? And they go, oh, my parents told me. I'm on my fifth generation of fans at this point. And the fact that the story still connects with them, too, means I did something valid.

FM. I also have questions about the brand new comics from IDW Publishing. When they first started doing THE CROW, you would do cover art, but no actual story. I was wondering what made you jump in and take the reins, story-wise.

JO. Well, the first story arc was written before I got involved. I had nothing to do

with it. I think it shows. I think they realized that they needed my input. IDW contacted me, and I said, look, if you want my involvement, this is what I need: I'm going to pick the people I want to work with. I have final say-so over all of it, and you don't get to make editorial changes. And [IDW's] Chris Ryall has been phenomenal about that. So far, his only editorial input has been, "James, just go do what you do." Which is great.

The second series ["Skinning the Wolves"] is set in a concentration camp. It did extremely well. In fact, it sold out so fast they had trouble getting into the graphic novel format quickly enough. That was illustrated by a friend of mine in Chicago. The third one, "Curare"—it's been the best reviewed comic for IDW in ages. And I thought that one would have difficulty, because it takes place over a ten year time span. It jumps back and forth, and it doesn't really tell you when. You have to pay attention. There are visual cues—each

CURARE

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# THE CROW

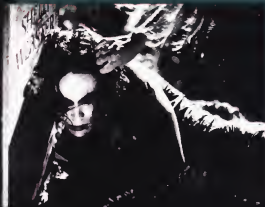


J. O'Barr



In staying true to the black and white comic, THE CROW was shot in a very muted palette, causing Roger Ebert to call the film "the best [cinematic] version of a comic universe I've ever seen."





period in time has a different color to it. It's based on a true story about a cop who obsessed over solving a ten year old girl's murder. She was raped and murdered and left in a field. He destroyed his life—he lost his job, became an alcoholic; his family left him. In reality, he never solved the case. They don't even know the girl's name—she's buried under a Jane Doe. I read that story twenty years ago and it always stuck with me, you know—wouldn't it be cool if we could get some actual justice—on paper, if not in the real world. What if the little girl came back to help him solve the case?

cartoonish look that I just couldn't do. I thought he was perfect.

**FM.** That brings me back to a question about aesthetics. The original comic has such a specific style. People might say that the look is very "80s", whatever that means. **JO.** Well, it's definitely set at that specific time.

**FM.** How have your aesthetics changed since then?

**JO.** I'm still attracted to the same things. Romance, true love, justice—and violence, too. Violence is a big part of my personality,

The guy who's drawing it [Antoine Dodé] is French. He's from Paris, and it's been a bit of a struggle, because he has no reference points for America. So he's had to do tremendous amounts of research on everything. But I think he's done a phenomenal job. I

wanted a kind of dark,

having grown up in Detroit. I am also doing a Crow book all by myself—writing and drawing—with a woman as the main character this time. It took me literally twenty years before I thought I could add something new and valid to the genre. I didn't want to repeat myself. And by telling a story from a woman's perspective this time... plus, I'm just a much better writer at this point, as well as an artist.

**FM.** What are your thoughts on genre? What genre would you call THE CROW in general?

**JO.** I'd call it gothic noir. So if you like the original, you'll definitely like this new one, because it's that and then five times more romantic, five times more violent... and I'm to that point now in my artistic career where if I can think it, I can draw it. Or I'm stubborn enough not to quit. I keep at it until I get what I want. Every page of this book I'm totally happy with. If I wasn't happy, I scrapped it and started over, because I have to answer to myself at the end of the day. To me, there's no such thing as "good enough". If it's not my absolute A-game, I scrap it and start over. And that goes for every aspect of it, from the writing to the

lettering. Everything I do is ink on paper. I don't use computers. The last of the old breed! I understand that a computer is a tool, and I've seen some amazing things done with Photoshop and whatnot. But for me, it would rob all the joy of creating out of it. The "undo" button. I like having a finished piece of artwork when I'm done. I don't want to have to hit "print".

**FM.** The physical aspect is very visceral, just like a lot of the stuff in your art—it's

very tactile, and you can see the textures... **JO.** Yes. For me, the joy is in dragging the brush across the page. I have no use for computers. Up until recently, I would go to the library to check my email. That way, I was limited to one hour a day. Cause you know how computers are—you can waste a whole day and never get anything done. I do have a computer now, because I deal with the guy in France. I send him script pages. But I still limit myself to one hour a day. I have a TV, but I don't have cable TV. I have movies. No real social life. [laughs]

**FM.** Throughout your career, since THE CROW first came out, you've really only needed to supervise Crow stories and basically do everything in that one world. You stick to that world. Was that a conscious choice, or did you ever want to get away from it?

**JO.** I definitely wanted to get away from it at first. The whole Crow thing just got too overwhelming for me. I never wanted to be rich and famous... and I don't want to be one of those people who bitches about being successful, but at that point I was a borribly shy person. I didn't like crowds. The joy of comics is that you get to connect to the reader vicariously. You don't have to be there. They can read your book, and it makes a connection. But once the film came out and the book started selling really well, I started... I don't want to say that I was "forced" to go to conventions, but it took me a long time to be able to enjoy shows.

**FM.** I think that's common. I didn't like

conventions until I started working them. **JO.** I like small conventions that are more comic-oriented. It almost feels like a family. We're all in the same sinking boat. We're the guys who stayed on board the Titanic and played the violins. **FM.** I wouldn't call comics a sinking boat! **JO.** Well, there's so much competition now. This generation of kids, they want everything now. They don't want to have to go to a bookstore or comic shop. They want everything instantly. The future of

comics is up in the air. I don't think they'll ever disappear completely, just like I don't think bookstores will disappear. People love books; they love having something to hold in their hand.

**FM.** Famous Monsters is still a print magazine for a reason! When the apocalypse happens...

**JO.** That's how I feel about drawing, too! I mean, hey—I can draw when the electricity goes off. All you motherf—ers with laptops are outta luck. [laughs]

## THE CROW



J.O'BARR

The original graphic novel (ABOVE), published by Caliber Comics, was O'Barr's artistic method of dealing with the personal trauma of losing his fiancée in a car crash caused by a drunk driver.



# GRAFFITI AND MIMES FROM HELL:

## ERNIE HUDSON ON 'THE CROW'

BY ANDREW HUDSON

While Ernie Hudson is best known by most people as Winston Zeddemore in the 1984 blockbuster *GHOSTBUSTERS*, many also know him as Sergeant Albrecht from the 1994 cult classic *THE CROW*. As *THE CROW* reaches its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Ernie recalls what it was like working on set, Brandon Lee, and why fans still cherish *THE CROW* after all these years.

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

I liked the script. I liked the character. I was more drawn to the character than the script, but I liked the script. I liked Sergeant Albrecht. I liked his humanity. That's what made me want to do the movie. I knew Brandon, and he was attached to the movie, so I thought it would be fun to work with him. But more than anything, I liked the character.

I got down to North Carolina and met Michael Wincott and the rest of the actors—Brandon [Lee], Rochelle [Davis] playing the little girl, and Sobia [Shinas] who played the girlfriend. I really thought everybody was very, very well cast. I thought they were great character types, and they were also very good actors. Marcus [Marco Rodriguez], who played my police captain, I had worked with him on a couple of movies before. I knew they would bring some integrity to the script. And of course, when I saw the movie, I saw I wasn't wrong.

### PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHY AND REHEARSALS

We jumped right into the shooting. We rehearsed for the day on the set. It's gotten to a place now where you never get a chance to rehearse before doing the scene. We rehearsed the day of; but we didn't have any rehearsal period like, say, we did with *GHOSTBUSTERS*, where we rehearsed for a few weeks before we shot anything. I always find that very helpful, but it's kind of unusual.

### WORKING WITH ALEX PROYAS

He's a wonderful director. When they asked me to do the movie, they sent me a reel of his. He had done some commercials, but he had this reel which was pretty extraordinary. I didn't know who he was. But I saw his reel and I knew that he knew about film.

My concern while in the early stages of shooting was that he not let the studios push him around so much. I felt that he was under a lot of pressure time-wise, plus the conditions, trying to keep the studio [Paramount] happy. I thought they were threatening to pull the plug, and I think they made it difficult for him.

After the accident with Brandon, he came back with a different determination for when we finished the movie up. I wish he had fought a little harder early on. Like most people in this business, he was trying to get the film done and keep the studios happy.

### WORKING WITH BRANDON LEE

Brandon I met early on when I was in Vancouver shooting a television series called *BROKEN BADGES* with Miguel Ferrer. Miguel and Brandon had known each other for a long time. I think they might've grown up together. Brandon came to Vancouver through Hong Kong, and spent about eight days up there banging out. Jimmy [James] Whitmore Jr. was directing this particular episode. And Miguel Ferrer, who was Jose Ferrer's son, was there, and Brandon Lee, Bruce Lee's [son]. And we were all in a room. All these people who I

had grown up watching—I was with their children. It was kind of cool.

Brandon was just a nice, respectful young man. I didn't know at the time we'd be working together. And when I got a movie to work with him on, he seemed very happy to have me there. I loved working with Brandon. He was totally committed. In addition to working god knows how many hours on set, he would find time to hang out with people. I know it's good to say nice things about people who have passed on, but it's better to be able to say it and really mean it. I really liked him a lot.

### AFTER THE TRAGEDY

I thought everybody felt the way I did when we first heard about the accident. I didn't want any part of it. I couldn't believe that it had actually happened. It was shocking. It still is shocking. So we waited... it must have been a month. I got a call from the make up artist [Lance Anderson], and he reminded me of how hard Brandon had worked on the movie and that we should really finish it for him.

So I went back along with everybody else, and we had about eight more days of shooting. It was a really dark time; but I think everybody came with that determination not to just finish it, but with a different resolve.

### MEMORIES ON THE SET

I remember getting to the set and seeing Brandon walking around with no shirt, no shoes on, and we were shooting in North Carolina [where] the temperature would



drop down to freezing at night. [Brandon] never complained. I went nuts, demanding they get some heaters in there, because we were shooting nights. They looked at me like I was crazy. He was just very unselfish. [Laughs] I remember when Bai Ling came on set. We were 'all hanging out in my dressing room talking; and she asked Brandon about something that was mentioned about his father being an actor. And she said, "Oh, was your father an actor?" And Brandon said, "Yeah." She said, "What is his name?" Brandon said, "Bruce Lee." And she said, "Oh, never heard of him."

[Laughs] I just thought that was the most ridiculous thing.

Later on, she explained to me that in China where she had just come from, he wasn't known by Bruce Lee, but "Lee Jun-fan". She hadn't recognized the American name or something.

## THE CROW SEQUELS

I saw Ed Pressman, who was one of the producers, after the sequel was done. He came up to me and said they regretted not having asked me back. That character was missing in the movie, and they wish they had brought mine back in.

I got a call about a television series they were doing I think in Vancouver or someplace. But I made it kind of clear I wouldn't do another CROW.

I don't know how the fans feel, but most of the fans I've talked to said pretty much that they've seen a couple of the sequels, but none of them [were as good].

I think we should leave it alone, to be perfectly honest with you. I think it was Brandon's movie.

## THE CROW COMIC BOOK

I didn't read it before doing the movie. I did look at the comic after the fact. And James O'Burr, who I met on the set while filming—he's a friend and I really like him a lot. But I didn't base [my performance] on the comic. I thought it was pretty much in the script.

And I think a lot of it had to do with how I felt about Brandon. If you're fortunate, you work with good people, so you don't have to go so much with your imagination and you can use your honest feelings. Brandon made it easy to get into that character. He's the kind of guy you wanna be there for. And the cop was going through some personal changes. So a lot of it was just what we created on set as opposed to trying to look into some existing character.

## THE CROW'S DETROIT

That's a Detroit that came after my time. I went to Detroit in '66 to live and go to college. I graduated from Wayne State. That was before Detroit really hit on hard times. In fact, you gotta remember that Detroit was one of the wealthiest cities in America back in the fifties and sixties. Things were happening. It was a very, very affluent place to be.

And then the riots and a few other things happened in the late sixties. Everything changed, and the drugs came in and then the politics got confused and there was "white flight", and the city really began to shift and change.

When Devil's Night started, people began to flee Detroit.

It's a beautiful city... or at least it was.

But it's changed. It isn't the city I knew when I was living there. I've gone back many times, but I hope they can find another identity. So much has been tied into the automobile industry.

The movie was a dark version of Detroit. I went there to go to college; I was married; I had two small children. I didn't see it from that dark perspective. James is from there; and he saw it differently. But when I was there going to school, it was a really cool place to be.

## LEGACY OF THE CROW

Every once in a while, an actor will get a role that's just created for him. I've spent the last forty years trying to find the role that's mine. I still haven't found it.

I really think this role was Brandon's role. And I think for a lot of people it was just something about him; there was something about the character that resonated with a lot of young people. Being outside the system, being up against the odds.

And I know they've done a number of CROW movies. I've never seen any of them. They've done a television show. They've been trying to mine the whole franchise. But to me, there was just one CROW, and that was one Brandon did. It still resonates with a lot of people and it's one of my favorite movies. Not just because I'm in it. I really like the movie. It's unfortunate what happened to Brandon. But if you're gonna make the ultimate sacrifice on a movie, at least let it be a good one. I think it's a good movie. It did what all actors want a movie to do: it showed just how talented he was. ●





## Edgar Rice Burroughs' Ink

This allowed Burroughs a great amount of freedom (and wealth). He bought a large swath of land outside of Los Angeles in Encino, CA and named it Tarzana. It was a sprawling estate with maid's quarters and the first in-ground swimming pool in the entire San Fernando Valley. Today, much of the estate has been developed into a community—a community that came together and ultimately voted to name their little enclave Tarzana in honor of Burroughs and his contributions to the area. But Burroughs' legacy is still as strong as ever, and ERB Inc. still closely watches over the various properties from a beautiful safari-styled house that looks like it was pulled straight from the pages of a Tarzan novel. The interior is lined with timeless ERB esoterica, including original Frazetta artworks of Tarzan, John Carter, and others, as well as an unfinished painting of ERB by his son. The team is headed by President Jim Sullos, archivist Cathy Willbanks, and a whole group dedicated to preserving the rich and storied legacy of one of America's great authors.

Not content to just be gatekeepers, the team at ERB Inc. has been working to find ways to bring these classic stories to new generations of readers, which leads us to their latest endeavor. ERB Inc. has teamed up with artists and storytellers to create a series of serialized online comic strips depicting Burroughs' most famous characters. Some strips are adaptations of classic stories while others are brand new works. The strips feature Tarzan, Carson of Venus, Pellucidar, The Mucker, and several more. Each strip has new panels released once per week and are available through an online subscription for just \$1.99 per month. That's an absolute steal considering all the artwork and storytelling that went into these comics.

On the following pages you'll find an excerpt from an original Tarzan story. This is an exclusive look at five parts for FM readers from deeper into the story as Tarzan looks for Jane as she finds a world reminiscent of ancient Greece. Previews of all the comics and sign-up info can be found at: <http://www.edgariceburroughs.com/comics/>

Edgar Rice Burroughs was unique amongst his peers. While his high adventure tales of Tarzan, John Carter, The Lost Continent, and so many others made him a legend in the pulp and literary communities, he was also a savvy businessman. Unlike his genre contemporaries like H.P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, and Edgar Allan Poe, Burroughs understood the larger implications and marketing potential of his works. Because of this keen sense, he would found Edgar Rice Burroughs, INC., a company that he would control and oversee the publishing and marketing of all his fictional works and characters.





# The New Adventures of Tarzan

by EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS



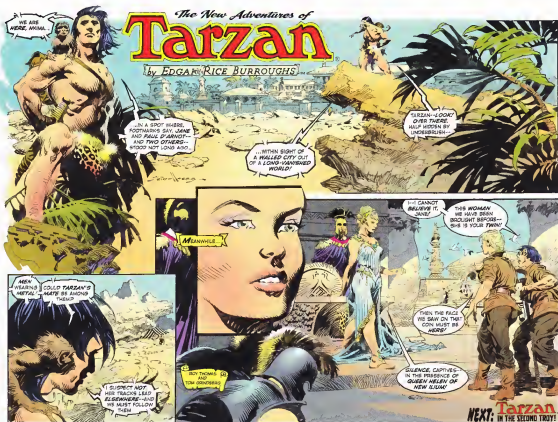
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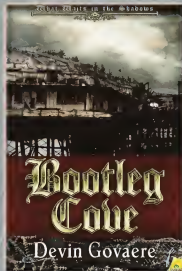
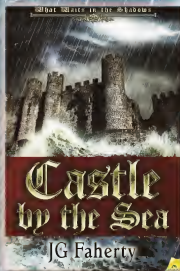


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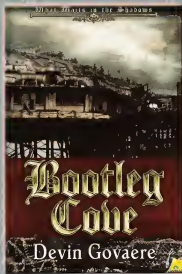
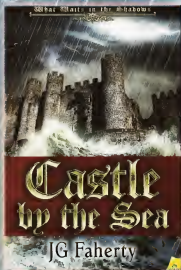
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